



SPECIAL YEAR-END AWARDS ISSUE!

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IS WRESTLER OF
THE YEAR NEXT?



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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Turnbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Whirl lock |

SETUP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricanrana | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

YOUR NAME (PRINT NEATLY)

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE

WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.

FROM the DESK OF...

PRO Wrestling
ILLUSTRATED

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(1919-2002)

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SOME OBSERVATIONS ON this year's Achievement Award voting, some of which was predictable, some surprising, some groundbreaking, but all an accurate reflection of the views of Western World wrestling fans. (Maybe *PWI* should get a Slammy for "Best Sports Entertainment Awards.")

Rollins Rolls Despite Bad Wheel: We've often pointed out that the timing of the balloting can play a crucial role in the outcome of the voting. Get hot in November and December and readers are more likely to reward someone who did his or her best work in January or February. Seth Rollins tore up his knee in November and missed the remainder of the year. It didn't matter. He still received 62 percent of the vote for Wrestler of the Year.

Moose And Tessa Are A Close Couple: I was a voter, not a vote-counter, back in 1972 and 1973, the last time Achievement Award balloting ended in ties. For years, I questioned how, with the number of votes cast, could two wrestlers receive exactly the same tally. I'm not suggesting there was any funny business going on, but could the vote have been so close that maybe the editors just decided to allow Jack Brisco and Fred Curry to share Most Popular Wrestler of the Year in 1972 and Tony Garea and Bob Orton Jr. to share Rookie of the Year in 1973? Matt Brock assures me that the results were legit, but until it nearly happened again in the Rookie category this year, I wasn't sure if Old Matt was working me. There was no tie this year, but the lead changed hands so many times before Moose edged out Tessa Blanchard at the deadline, I thought it actually might happen.

Banks & Bayley ... Bayley & Banks: Not only had a women's match never been voted Match of the Year until now, but only once in the history of the awards had a women's match received a runner-up spot (Alundra Blayze vs. Bull Nakano, fourth place, 1994). This year's Bayley vs. Sasha Banks bouts on October 7 and August 22 were voted Match of the Year and first runner-up, respectively. That's remarkable in its own right, but made even more so in that the two matches were actually competing with each other for votes. Combined, nearly four in 10 readers voted for one of those two matches. The next two finishers (Brock Lesnar vs. John Cena vs. Seth Rollins and Cena vs. Kevin Owens) combined to garner half the number of votes.

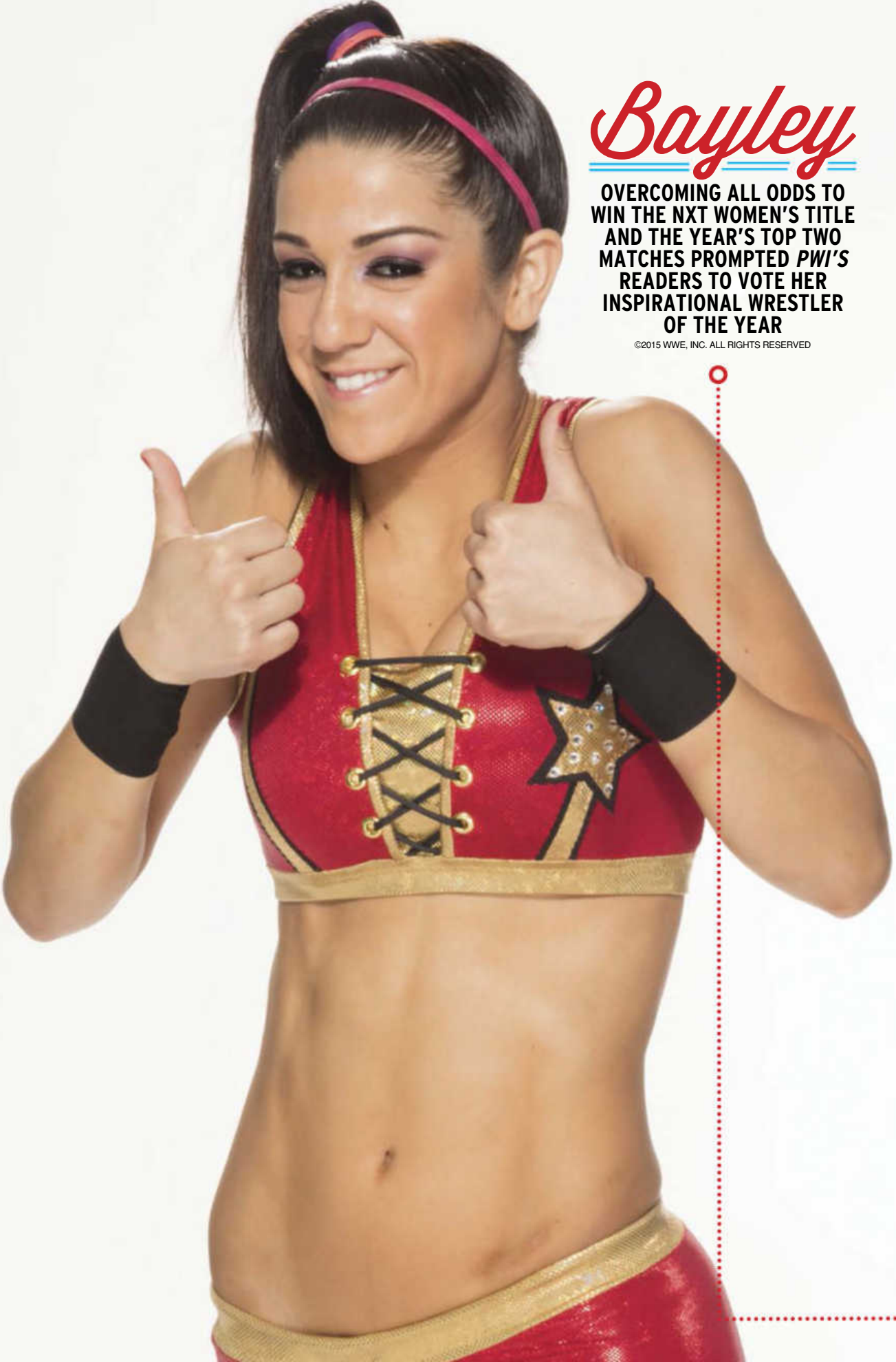
PWI Achievement vs. WWE Slammys: The Slammy Awards are voted by the fans via social media. At least that's what WWE claims. Forgive me for being skeptical, but with the amount of overlap between WWE viewers and *PWI* readers, it's hard for me to fathom how the results could have been this different. How, for instance, did The Usos win the Slammy for Tag Team of the Year when Jey was out for seven months and the team did not hold the title for the entire calendar year? They received *not one* vote from *PWI* readers. We did have the same result on Wrestler/Superstar of the Year (Rollins) and Feud/Rivalry (Undertaker vs. Lesnar), and certainly a case can be made for Nikki Bella as Woman/Diva of the Year, considering our readers' selection, Sasha Banks, spent most of the year in NXT, which, apparently, was not included for consideration for the Slammys. Finally, with all due respect to Triple-H and Sting, their WrestleMania match was hardly worthy of a nomination. I don't know how many Slammy votes it actually received, but it didn't get *any* consideration from *PWI* readers.

Enjoy the Year-End issue and have a healthy and happy New Year!

Stu Saks
Publisher

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A full-body photograph of Bayley, a professional wrestler, standing against a white background. She is wearing a red wrestling singlet with gold trim and a gold star on the right side. She has her hair in a high ponytail with a pink headband. She is giving two thumbs up with a smile.

Bayley

OVERCOMING ALL ODDS TO
WIN THE NXT WOMEN'S TITLE
AND THE YEAR'S TOP TWO
MATCHES PROMPTED *PWI*'S
READERS TO VOTE HER
INSPIRATIONAL WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR

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APRIL 2016

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REACHING EACH OTHER ...

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It was unfortunate that Seth Rollins' breakout year was cut short by injury, but he did enough in 10 months to convince our readers that he was deserving of Wrestler of the Year honors. Rollins may not have been the story of the year, though. Sasha Banks and Bayley were big winners in this year's balloting, which bodes extremely well for the future of women's wrestling

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Once again, our readers proved that they can be witty, insightful, and downright insulting!

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By popular demand, we revived this feature that formerly appeared in the *PWI Almanac*. (The listing of past Achievement Award winners can now be found at www.pwi-online.com)

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Eight of our veteran writers and editors recall their top moment of the year

RINGSIDE

WITH HARRY BURKETT

ROUND AND ROUND they go, where they stop, nobody knows." Trying to keep track of your favorite wrestling programs is becoming an increasingly difficult challenge, as TNA and Ring of Honor, in particular, continue to bounce from one network to another. The verdict is in: Pro wrestling on Destination America was a complete failure.

Will TNA's relationship with Pop

be any different? "One of our taglines here is that we're fans, too ... I remember being that way myself, when I was very much into wrestling," Pop TV President **Brad Schwartz** told *The Miami Herald*. "In some ways, when you see the crowd shots at a wrestling show, that was a bigger selling point to us than the ring shots."

Too often, the wrestling media has depicted TNA as a dying com-

pany trying to sell a stigmatized product. Schwartz' account of how Pop reached the deal with TNA President **Dixie Carter** indicates that isn't necessarily the case. "We had our entire team meet with them and listen to the pitch and listen to what they wanted to do—where they saw the company going ... By the end of the meeting, she had won everyone in the room over, and the next day it was unanimous, 'Let's do this.' Then it was a matter of, 'Can we get it?'"

It's encouraging that Pop executives opted to air a special "Best Of 2015" episode of *Impact Wrestling* before its official premiere on Tuesday, January 5. The two-hour show went against a live *Smackdown*, which aired on its new cable home, the USA Network. Meanwhile, *Paragon Pro Wrestling*, which aired Saturdays at 8 a.m. on Pop, will cease airing on the network, but will be available throughout the U.S. via syndication.

Destination America aired its final episode of *Impact Wrestling* on December 16 at the not-so-flattering hour of 11 p.m. Eastern. The struggling network had welcomed TNA with great fanfare at the start of 2015 and had been rewarded with good ratings, but undermined TNA by confirming it wouldn't be renewing the deal, essentially giving *Impact Wrestling* a lame-duck presence for the second half of the year. DA also showed tremendous bad faith by reaching an agreement with Ring of Honor to air its programming on the same night.

Likewise, the final episode of *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* aired on Destination America on November 25. The program still airs on Sinclair Broadcasting stations across the U.S. and is now available on Comet, a new digital over-the-air network co-owned by Sinclair and MGM. Comet airs MGM-owned movies and science-fiction programming. ROH's first airing on Comet



Pop TV President Brad Schwartz is excited about signing a deal to carry *Impact Wrestling*. Hopefully, Pop can provide the sort of stability for TNA that Destination America could not.

COURTESY OF POP TV

occurred on Wednesday night, December 2, at 12:00 a.m. Eastern.

Speaking of ROH, it wasn't entirely clear whether **AJ Styles** would be at The 2300 Arena in Philadelphia to challenge heavyweight champion **Jay Lethal** on December 18 at Final Battle. Yet Styles made the engagement despite injuries to his hip and lower back—and it was a heckuva match. Lethal's strategy was simple: avoid the Styles Clash at all costs. Styles attempted the maneuver several times, but had to fall back on his other offensive weapons, including the Calf-Killer, the Bloody Sunday underhook DDT, and his leaping forearm smash. Styles stunned the fans in attendance by kicking out of the champion's Lethal Injection sit-out power bomb. He rallied by attempting yet another Styles Clash, but Lethal countered with a cradle piledriver, sending a message to the legendary **Jerry Lynn**, who was doing color commentary at ringside. The champ finished off Styles with a second Lethal Injection at the 22-minute mark.

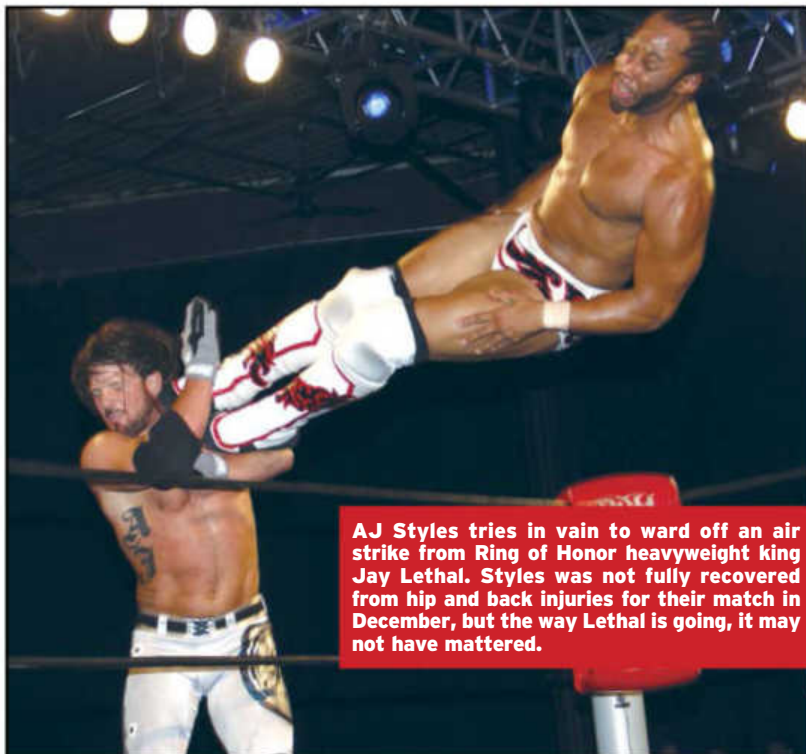


PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

AJ Styles tries in vain to ward off an air strike from Ring of Honor heavyweight king Jay Lethal. Styles was not fully recovered from hip and back injuries for their match in December, but the way Lethal is going, it may not have mattered.

Also on the card, TV champion **Roderick Strong** defeated **Bobby Fish**, and **War Machine**—comprised of **Ray Rowe** and **Hanson**—upset **The Kingdom** for the tag team title. And late word is The Kingdom is no more. **Mike Bennett** and wife/manager **Maria Kanellis** have opted not to re-sign with ROH, and Matt Taven suffered a knee injury during the title match ... and we don't know whether Taven will renew his contract in March.

Will **Roman Reigns** usher in a new era in WWE? The pressure has been on Reigns ever since **Seth Rollins** vacated the World title in November due to a severe knee injury. Then came the culmination of the World title tournament at Survivor Series, where Reigns defeated U.S. champ **Alberto Del Rio** in the semifinals and then beat good friend **Dean Ambrose** in only nine minutes to capture his first-ever WWE World championship.

When WWE Vice President **Triple-H** entered the ring to offer a handshake amid the falling confetti, Reigns speared him instead.

But that gave **Sheamus** the opening he needed. He cashed in his Money in the Bank title challenge and nailed the weary Reigns with two Brogue Kicks to capture the title.

While Sheamus relied on the interference of new teammates Del Rio and **Rusev**—as well as Triple-H—to retain the title against Reigns at WWE's TLC event, he was scheduled to defend against Reigns again the following night on *Raw*. Reigns and WWE Chairman **Vince McMahon** exchanged some vicious words in the prior segment, ending with McMahon kicking Reigns below the belt. Reigns once again combated the interference of Rusev—and the 70-year-old McMahon—to defeat Sheamus after 16 minutes of action.

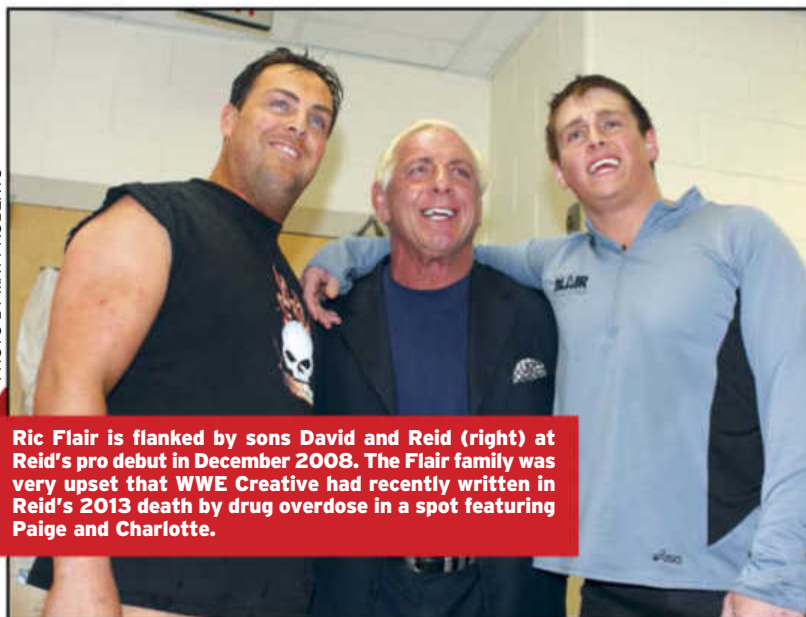
Perhaps the year's worth of travails—including his poor reception at the 2015 Royal Rumble, his loss at WrestleMania 31, and the obstacles he had to overcome at Survivor Series and TLC—have made Reigns more palatable to fans. The WWE Universe likes to humble their superstars before granting them headliner status.

Just as **Cesaro** gained momen-



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Roman Reigns fought off fan resistance, WWE executives, and finally Sheamus to capture the WWE World title. A chant from the Philadelphia fans of "You deserve it!" may mark the turning point in this promising star's career.



Ric Flair is flanked by sons David and Reid (right) at Reid's pro debut in December 2008. The Flair family was very upset that WWE Creative had recently written in Reid's 2013 death by drug overdose in a spot featuring Paige and Charlotte.

tum as a hot fan favorite, particularly after his series of matches against then-Intercontinental champ **Kevin Owens**, the Swiss star was forced to go on hiatus following surgery on his left shoulder. Apparently, Cesaro suffered a complete tear after fighting through the pain for two months.

"I knew something was wrong, but I thought that it was just

sprained or something like that," Cesaro told wwe.com. "So I iced it and had it looked at. I was like, 'Oh, I have range of motion,' and didn't necessarily have too much of a loss of strength, so I knew something got hurt, but I didn't think it was injured, if that makes sense."

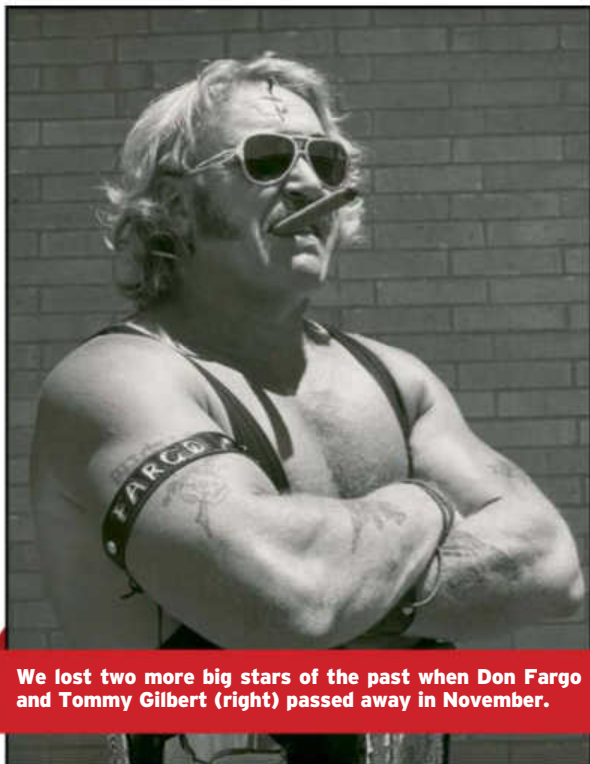
Also on the disabled list, **Nikki Bella** is suffering from bulging discs in her neck that are pressing against

her spinal cord, according to TMZ. The former Divas champion hopes that time off and neck rehabilitation will allow her to avoid surgery.

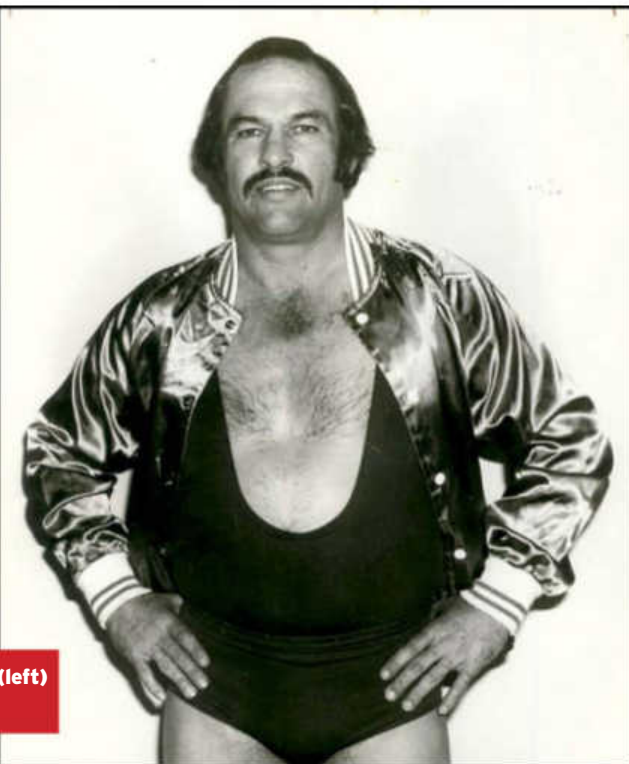
Meanwhile, Nikki's brother-in-law, **Daniel Bryan**, confirmed to *The Straits Times*, a Singapore newspaper, that WWE officials are not eager for the ex-World champ to ever return to the ring, given his history of concussions. "They keep sending me to do more tests, brain MRIs, brain EGs, and all my tests have come back great to the point where my brain is better than someone my age with no concussion."

Bryan adds that he's still hoping for a bout against **Brock Lesnar** someday, but concedes that his next wrestling match could occur outside of WWE.

"He must not have had much fight in him" was the line uttered by **Paige** before she and **Charlotte** got involved in a brawl to close out *Raw* just prior to Survivor Series. It was a reference to Charlotte's brother, **Reid Flair**, who died of a drug overdose in 2013 at age 25. Few are blaming Charlotte or even Paige for the statement, which was



We lost two more big stars of the past when Don Fargo (left) and Tommy Gilbert (right) passed away in November.



written for her, with Vince McMahon's apparent consent.

"Obviously, I have an opinion, but I'm afraid to voice it because I don't want to affect Ashley's career," **Ric Flair**, Charlotte's father, said on his *Whoo! Nation* podcast. "I don't think she feels like she's comfortable enough to say no to anything yet ... And if somebody writes it down, you know, one person approves everything."

That was apparently a veiled reference to McMahon, but Flair added that he would not harbor a long-term grudge over the issue.

Justin Credible wrestled his final match, a hardcore affair against longtime rival **Tommy Dreamer**, at Pro Wrestling Syndicate event in Sayreville, New Jersey, in November. Credible addressed his fans on Twitter: "I want to thank everyone from the bottom of my heart for all of your support over 23 years. You made my dreams come true."

Credible's career reached its apex in the year 2000, when he reigned as ECW World heavyweight champion for six months while concurrently holding the World tag team title with **Lance Storm** for much of that time.

Another ECW alum, **Hack Myers**, passed away on December 5 at age 41. He had undergone brain surgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore about two weeks earlier. The longtime favorite spent much of his time on ECW's undercard, but did enjoy a breakout year in 1995, when he won at two consecutive major ECW events, with victories over **Big Malley** at Hardcore Heaven and **Val Puccio** at Heatwave. Fans often chanted "shah!" which reverberated throughout the

ECW Arena whenever Myers punched or kicked his opponents, earning him the nickname of the "Extreme Shah Of ECW."

Tommy Gilbert, who died on November 26 at age 75, spent much of his 15-year in-ring career in Tennessee, where he held the NWA Southern heavyweight, junior heavyweight, and tag team championships. He was successful on his occasional forays outside his home state, also winning the Caribbean heavyweight, Florida TV, and U.S. junior heavyweight titles. Gilbert rounded out his career as a referee for the Mid-South's UWF. But he is perhaps best known as the father of **Eddie** and **Doug Gilbert**.

Don Fargo, whose real name was **Donald Vincent Kalt**, passed away on November 8 at age 85. One of the most prolific tag team wrestlers of all-time, Fargo held an estimated 45 tag team championships during his career. Although he's best known for his partnership with faux brother **Jackie Fargo**, he also kept the Fargo Brothers gimmick going with **Sonny Fargo** and **Johnny Fargo** (later known as **Greg Valentine**). While Fargo enjoyed most of his success in Tennessee, he also formed teams with **Sgt. Jacques Goulet**, **Hank James**, and future **Rock 'n' Roll Express** member **Robert Gibson**.

We would also like to extend our condolences to the family and friends of four-time AWA World champion **Nick Bockwinkel**, who died on November 14 at age 80. Appropriately, his passing is highlighted among our "Biggest News Stories of 2015" on page 60.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me.

NEWS ANALYSIS

TOO POOPED TO POP

As much as I'm relieved that TNA has landed yet another cable home, it's hard to get caught up in all the fanfare. The problem isn't so much with TNA, but the tumultuous cable market. Channels such as Pop and Destination America are trying to create unique brand identities while appealing to as many viewers as possible. That's not easy, and wrestling usually doesn't fit in their long-term plans.

LETHAL'S STYLISH PERFORMANCE

For a member of the House of Truth, Lethal is receiving plenty of kudos as ROH champion. Although he dropped the TV title to Roderick Strong late last year, his clean win over AJ Styles at Final Battle solidified his greatness. Lethal was set to face many challengers as of press time: Michael Elgin, Adam Cole, and maybe even Jerry Lynn. Can he keep his momentum going?

REIGNS' REIGN SO FAR

I'm a fan of Roman Reigns: He's big, handsome, athletic, charismatic, and dedicated. He's a blue-chipper with the stuff to be World champion. But this year-long grooming process has come across as awkward, clumsy, and contrived. The fact that WWE had to dip into its 1998 bag of tricks for a physical confrontation with Vince McMahon doesn't bode well. WrestleMania may well be his Waterloo.

HE COULD'VE BEEN CAESAR!

The greatest champions have represented generational shifts or philosophical shifts in the industry: Hulk Hogan, Shawn Michaels, and Steve Austin come to mind. Each of those men seemed to ride a wave to the championship, making their crowning achievement inevitable. Cesaro seemed to be charting that course at the time of his injury ... while poor Roman needed a life raft.

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PWf

ACHIEVEMENT 2015 | THE YEAR IN REVIEW

SECTION COMPILED BY DAN MURPHY

(Added contributions by Al Castle, Harry Burkett, Brady Hicks, Mike Bessler, Kevin McElvaney, Louie Dee, Brady Hicks, & Stu Saks)



THE EDITORS OF *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* had their say with the “PWf 500” and the “Female 50.” Now, the annual Achievement Awards give our readers the chance to make their voices heard.

Established in 1972, the PWf Achievement Awards are the oldest fan-decided awards in pro wrestling. The voting period for the 11 Achievement Awards was from November 5 through December 18. As has been the trend for the past few years, WWE once again dominated the awards. But, unlike last year, WWE didn’t score a clean sweep, as Ring of Honor’s Moose won the Rookie of the Year award, barely beating out third-generation up-and-comer Tessa Blanchard in the most tightly contested award category.

History was made in the Match of the Year category, as a women’s match earned the honor for the first time in the history of the Achievement Awards. In a year with several viable MOTY candidates, Bayley and Sasha Banks not only took home the top honor, but the first runner-up spot as well.

New Japan Pro Wrestling also had a strong showing in the awards, earning runner-up designations in the Most Popular category (Shinsuke Nakamura finished third runner-up) and the Feud of the Year category (Kazuchika Okada vs. Hiroshi Tanahashi was third runner-up). New

Japan is gaining prominence and visibility, and that fact was reflected in the voting.

The winner of this year’s Stanley Weston Award, chosen by our staff to honor a lifetime of contribution to the wrestling industry, is Roddy Piper. One of the most influential performers of all-time, Piper died unexpectedly of cardiac arrest on July 31. Piper was one of the stars of the first WrestleMania and a key figure in the growth and expansion of the WWF in the mid-1980s. His name joins an illustrious list of Weston Award winners that includes three other iconic stars who left us this year, Nick Bockwinkel, Dusty Rhodes, and Verne Gagne.

This special issue includes all the usual fun features, including our Year in Review photo section (complete with a listing of all major 2015 title changes), your hilarious “Unofficial Official Awards,” and our staff picks for their top memories of the past year. For the first time ever, we are running the Top 10 stories of the year, a feature that for years appeared in the *PWf Almanac*. Due to space constraints, we have moved our year-by-year listing of previous Achievement Award winners to our website, pwi-online.com.

This year’s votes are counted and the winners are named on the following pages. Don’t worry—we didn’t let Steve Harvey anywhere near the ballot boxes! Enjoy!

Moose has had plenty of hard-fought battles in his burgeoning wrestling career, but his toughest challenge to date came from an opponent that was literally half his size.

In the closest contest in the 2015 Achievement Award balloting, the former NFL offensive tackle barely beat out Tessa Blanchard for Rookie of the Year.

Moose debuted in Ring of Honor in June 2014 and has already established himself as one of the promotion's most physically dominant and exciting competitors. At 6'5" and 295 pounds, Moose is a freakish athlete whose mix of size, strength, and athleticism is eerily reminiscent of a young Brock Lesnar.

Quinn Ojinnaka was a fifth-round draft pick for the Atlanta Falcons in 2006. He played with the Falcons for four years, followed by stints with the New England Patriots, the Indianapolis Colts, and the St. Louis Rams.

Moose has the ability to execute a standing dropkick

from the ring and knock opponents from off the top turnbuckle, demonstrating a remarkable vertical leap for a man his size. He went undefeated for the first half of the year until suffering a controversial loss to Cedric Alexander.

Since then, Moose has parted with manager Veda Scott and allied with Stokely Hathaway. Hathaway has made it his goal to lead Moose to either the ROH heavy-weight or TV title. Given Moose's immense physical gifts, the odds are certainly in his favor.

Trained by Curtis Hughes and refined in the ROH Dojo, Moose has made a seamless transition from the gridiron to the squared circle. His spear is delivered with violent precision. His clothesline can separate an opponent's head from his shoulders. His dropkick is a thing of beauty. The sky seems to be the limit for one of the most impressive rookies wrestling has seen in several years.

PHOTO BY BLAKE THOMAS/BLIZ PHOTOGRAPHY



31%

TESSA BLANCHARD

The daughter of Tully Blanchard and granddaughter of Joe Blanchard is quickly establishing herself as a major indy player. Tessa has the poise and presence of a veteran.

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21%

BRAUN STROWMAN

The black sheep of the Wyatt Family is an intimidating presence and a freakish powerhouse. He has shown promise in early outings in WWE, but he's still quite raw.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



12%

DANA BROOKE

The former gymnast and fitness model has made an impressive transition into wrestling. Emma has been a great mentor and Brooke has proved to be a fast learner.

4%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include: Patrick Clark, Dragon Lee II, George Gatton, and Kazusada Higuchi

32%



ROOKIE
OF THE YEAR
MOOSE

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

It's tough to be a role model these days.

In this era of pervasive social media and viral gossip stories, one unfortunate comment or bad decision can ruin a career. Today's hero can become tomorrow's pariah; just ask Hulk Hogan.

NXT Women's champion Bayley is a breath of fresh air in an environment that all-too-often becomes polluted with boorish behavior, egotism, and scandal. At a time when many pro athletes shy away from the term "role model," Bayley has embraced the adulation of her fans, inspiring a generation of young girls with her determination, her passion, and her positivity. Little Izzy—a girl who attends NXT events and sits in the front row, dressed as her idol—has become Bayley's most famous fan, but there are "Izzys" all across the country, proudly brandishing signs in arenas and watching at home on television.

Bayley projects a wholesome image that proves that a woman doesn't have to exploit her sexuality in this business to succeed.

In addition to being a terrific role model, Bayley was an inspiration inside the ring as well. Since her arrival

in NXT, critics contended that Bayley lacked the toughness needed to become a champion. She didn't have a killer instinct. And, for a while, the critics seemed to have a point. Shots at the NXT Women's title were few and far between, and when she did receive title opportunities, Bayley was unable to pull out the win.

That changed this year. After missing two months with a broken hand, Bayley returned to the ring with renewed focus and passion. She won her feud with Emma and demanded a championship match, but to get the match, Bayley had to beat former champion Charlotte. She did. Then she had to beat Becky Lynch. And she did.

At NXT TakeOver: Brooklyn, Bayley received her title shot in front of a capacity crowd at the Barclays Center, and she wrestled the match of her life, defeating Sasha Banks for the NXT Women's championship.

Then, at NXT TakeOver: Respect, Bayley proved that her win was no fluke. She rallied to defeat the former champion in a classic 30-minute Iron Man match.

Bayley answered her critics. She proved her toughness. And she did it with class and style.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



JOHN CENA

This year, Cena became the first celebrity to grant 500 wishes in the history of the Make-A-Wish Foundation. He also had a string of fantastic matches in his U.S. Open Challenge series of matches. He even won a match against Seth Rollins with a shattered nose.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



KEVIN OWENS

Unlike most of the other top vote-getters, Owens isn't a clean-cut fan favorite. Still, he inspired 11 percent of the respondents because he beat the odds and achieved his dream. He doesn't have the traditional look, but his talent, drive, and ambition took him to the promised land.

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SAMI ZAYN

The former NXT champion made a surprising debut on *Raw* in May, challenging Cena for the U.S. title. Despite a substantial size and weight disadvantage, Zayn pushed Cena to the limit. He was curtailed by a shoulder injury, but his fighting spirit cannot be extinguished.

37%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters who did not capture a runner-up spot include: Tim Donst, Chris Hero, Jay Lethal, Titus O'Neil, Paige, Allie Parker, and Cody Rhodes

INSPIRATIONAL
WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR

BAYLEY



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26%

When Roman Reigns won The Royal Rumble, the critics came out of the woodwork.

Reigns was too one-dimensional. He was too bland. He was too generic. In short, he was the polar opposite of Daniel Bryan, the consensus fan choice to win the bout and go on to WrestleMania.

Reigns heard the criticisms and faced them head-on, beating Bryan in a top contender's match at Fastlane. He wrestled the match of his life against Brock Lesnar at WrestleMania, but came away empty-handed as Seth Rollins spoiled his party and stole the title.

When Reigns took the pinfall that enabled Rollins to win Lesnar's title, the critics were louder than ever.

Reigns lacked killer instinct. He couldn't win the big one. He had the chance of a lifetime and he let it slip through his fingers.

The criticisms stung, but Reigns was committed to proving his doubters wrong. He went to war against Bray Wyatt and The Wyatt Family and came out on top. In November, Reigns got another opportunity for the championship, and he was determined to make the

most of it. He entered a tournament to crown a new champion and went on to beat The Big Show, Cesaro, Alberto Del Rio, and Dean Ambrose to win the tourney and claim the gold.

Reigns' first WWE title reign lasted a mere 5 minutes 15 seconds. As confetti was still swirling through the air, Sheamus cashed in his Money in the Bank shot and pinned Reigns for the title. As Sheamus escaped with the belt, Reigns lay on his back with tears in his eyes. That moment proved to be a turning point in his career.

At TLC, Reigns attacked with reckless abandon. The shackles came off. He fought like a man possessed, battering Sheamus, as well as Triple-H and the other members of the League of Nations. One night later, Reigns received a rematch and made the most of it, beating Sheamus to regain the title and clobbering Vince McMahon for good measure.

The cool, even-keeled Reigns the critics had trashed was replaced by a hungry and fierce warrior. Reigns had found the desperation and drive to kick his game up into a higher gear.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



NIKKI BELLA

Bella held on to the Divas title for a record-setting 301 days and was named number one in the 2015 *PWI* "Female 50." She made great strides as a wrestler, winning over a large segment of the fan base that had never respected her ability as a competitor.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



SASHA BANKS

Banks developed into one of the top women wrestlers in the world. She helped raise the NXT Women's title to the main-event level. She went on to make an immediate impact on the main roster. Her rapid rise from developmental prospect to superstar was staggering.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



BAYLEY

Like Reigns, Bayley had been accused of lacking a killer instinct. She proved that she was more than a hugger with two incredible wins over Sasha Banks. She refused to be intimidated, matching Banks move for move. No one questions her toughness now.

21%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include: Tyler Breeze, Baron Corbin, Jax Dane, New Day, Prime Time Players, Rockstar Spud, Jimmy Uso, and The Vaudevillains

A full-page photograph of Roman Reigns. He is wearing a black tactical vest over a black tank top. He has long, dark, wavy hair and a beard. His right arm is heavily tattooed with intricate Polynesian-style designs. He is looking off to the side with a serious expression. In the top right corner, there is a red circle with '35%' and a blue square with a white play button icon. In the bottom right, there is a white-bordered box containing the text 'MOST IMPROVED WRESTLER OF THE YEAR' and 'ROMAN REIGNS' on a red background. On the bottom left, there is vertical text: 'PHOTO BY STU SAKS'.

35%



**MOST IMPROVED
WRESTLER**

⚡ OF THE YEAR ⚡

**ROMAN
REIGNS**

PHOTO BY STU SAKS

With "The Streak" ended in 2014, fans wondered what to expect from The Undertaker in his first WrestleMania appearance since his shocking loss to Brock Lesnar. Would "The Dead Man" still have the drive to win on the WrestleMania stage? Or was that loss the end of an era? Did Lesnar's win kill the aura of "The Phenom" forever?

Bray Wyatt found out the hard way. Wyatt challenged 'Taker to a match at WrestleMania 31, and The Undertaker won handily. But this year, Undertaker didn't simply go back to Death Valley and await his next WrestleMania booking. The lopsided win over Wyatt was just a tease of things to come.

Undertaker shocked the world when he appeared at Battleground and attacked Lesnar. He quickly made it known that he was back ... and that he was back for blood.

At WrestleMania 30, Undertaker, approaching 50 years old, looked slow and off his game (which can probably be ascribed largely to the concussion he suffered early in that bout). When Undertaker appeared

at Battleground, he looked leaner, faster, and much more aggressive. He wasn't relying on the pomp and ceremony of the "Dead Man" character—he was looking to kick ass. Instead of destroying the mystique, the loss at WrestleMania 30 actually re-energized The Undertaker.

Though he ultimately lost to Lesnar at Hell in a Cell, he showed that he still had plenty more gas left in the tank when he reunited with Kane and defeated The Wyatt Family at Survivor Series. This time, Undertaker brought out his "supernatural" artillery, commanding lightning bolts and peals of thunder. Even against a master like Wyatt, 'Taker showed he could still wage psychological warfare like no other.

Wyatt claimed he had stolen The Undertaker's soul, but the fact is, Undertaker's soul was never in jeopardy. Twenty-five years after his WWE debut, 'Taker showed that he is still an elite performer and a first-ballot Hall-of-Famer. To paraphrase Mark Twain, any reports of The Undertaker's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

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14%

SHEAMUS

"The Celtic Warrior" returned from injury with a nasty new attitude (and some questionably braided facial hair). He won the Money in the Bank match and cashed in his title shot at Survivor Series, surprising Roman Reigns and regaining the WWE title for the first time since 2010.

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



9%

RODERICK STRONG

Strong overcame a serious neck injury and compiled a string of incredible matches this year. In October, he defeated Jay Lethal for the ROH TV title, restoring him to his rightful position atop the ROH ladder. In ROH, FIP, PWG, and in EVOLVE, Strong has been superb.

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8%

DANIEL BRYAN

Bryan returned from his spinal injury, but just a few months later, he was sidelined again, this time due to ongoing concussion issues. His story was inspirational, and he was settling into a groove as Intercontinental champion, but was once again forced to vacate his title.

35%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include: The Dudley Boyz, Yuji Okabayashi, Raymond Rowe, Ryback, and Sting

34%



COMEBACK
OF THE YEAR

THE UNDERTAKER

When it was announced that Nikki Bella received the top spot in the 2015 *PWI* "Female 50," Sasha Banks was quick to post her displeasure on social media.

"BLOCKED!!!" she tweeted at @OfficialPWI. She also posted a meme with a laundry list of her accomplishments and noting that she wasn't ranked number-one, ending with "but that's none of my business," taking a swipe at *PWI*'s list.

Our editorial staff stands by the decision to rank Bella number-one in the "Female 50" (301 days as Divas champion is an unprecedented accomplishment, after all), but the voters have spoken, and they have thrown their support behind "The Boss" as Woman of the Year.

Banks (who was ranked third in the F50 behind Bella and Paige) captured the NXT Women's championship on February 11, dethroning Charlotte in a four-way bout that also included Becky Lynch and Bayley. She kept a stranglehold on the title for 192 days until losing to Bayley in the main event of NXT TakeOver: Brooklyn. Banks proved to be a fighting champion, and her swagger and confidence made her a cult favorite. With wins

over Charlotte, Lynch, and Bayley, Banks helped elevate the NXT Women's championship to the main-event level. While Bella was dominating WWE, Banks was drawing critical acclaim in NXT.

On July 13, "The Boss" made her highly anticipated debut on the main roster when she was introduced by Stephanie McMahon and aligned with Naomi and Tamina Snuka as Team B.A.D. Banks pulled double-duty, competing on the main roster while still defending the NXT title. She scored wins over some of WWE's most established women, including Brie Bella, Paige, and Lynch. At NXT TakeOver: Respect, she challenged Bayley for the NXT title. Though she lost that match, Banks and Bayley once again put on a modern classic, and *PWI* readers responded by voting it Match of the Year.

This isn't the first time the Woman of the Year award went to someone other than the one *PWI* named number-one in that year's "Female 50." In fact, it's the fifth consecutive year that it has happened. The last woman to win both Woman of the Year and top the F50 was Michelle McCool in 2010.

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23%

NIKKI BELLA

Bella had the best year of her career, breaking AJ Lee's record as longest-reigning Divas champion. A neck injury sidelined Bella as the *PWI* award voting began, which may have affected her overall tally. The hope is that can correct the problem with rehab and avoid surgery.

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19%

CHARLOTTE

Last year, we touted Charlotte (who won the Rookie of the Year award) as a future Divas champion. It didn't take her long; she won the belt less than four months after joining the main roster. Her apparent rule-breaking turn tempered some of the excitement over that achievement.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



15%

PAIGE

Paige was a contender for the Divas title for the entire year. She was the most consistent—and entertaining—female on the WWE roster throughout the year. She never managed to capture the Divas title in 2015, however, a fact that kept this award just out of her reach.

13%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters who did not capture a runner-up spot include: Bayley, Santana Garrett, Gail Kim, Stephanie McMahon, Sexy Star, and Taryn Terrell

30%



WOMAN

OF THE YEAR

**SASHA
BANKS**

"I'm going to kill you!"
"You're gonna have to!"

That violent exchange took place during a massive pull-apart brawl between Brock Lesnar and The Undertaker on the July 20 edition of *Raw*. The night before, "The Dead Man" made a surprise appearance during Lesnar's match against WWE World champion Seth Rollins, attacking Lesnar and laying him out with a pair of Tombstone Piledrivers. Undertaker later explained that he attacked Lesnar not because Lesnar had ended 'Taker's storied WrestleMania winning streak the year before, but because of the incessant boasting Lesnar and Paul Heyman had done about ending the streak.

Predictably, a fight broke out, and it took most of the WWE locker room to try to keep Lesnar and Undertaker from tearing each other to pieces.

The WrestleMania rematch played out at SummerSlam, where Undertaker avenged his WrestleMania 30 loss by choking out Lesnar with his Hell's Gate lock. However, what referee Charles Robinson failed to notice was that Undertaker had actually tapped out to

a Kimura Lock moments earlier. The timekeeper rang the bell, having seen the tap-out, and in the ensuing confusion, Undertaker landed a low blow and locked in the Hells' Gate to score a controversial victory.

That led to the rubber match at Hell in a Cell on October 25. Once again, Lesnar and Undertaker pushed one another to the limit in a bloody 22-minute war. Neither man would accept defeat: Lesnar kicked out of Tombstones, Undertaker kicked out of F5s. Finally, in frustration and perhaps desperation, Lesnar actually ripped up the ring canvas and pulled out the thin layer of padding underneath, then executed a third F5, dropping Undertaker head-first on the exposed wooden planks of the ring. This time, there was no kicking out. Lesnar won the match and ended one of the most explosive and intense feuds in recent memory.

There was a sense that this could have been The Undertaker's last great series of matches, and perhaps the proverbial torch had been passed. It was a feud between two larger-than-life competitors and one of the greatest pro wrestling rivalries of all-time.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



JOHN CENA vs. KEVIN OWENS

Owens made a memorable *Raw* debut as the then-NXT champion answered Cena's U.S. Open challenge, simply to attack Cena and disrespect the title. Owens cleanly beat Cena at Elimination Chamber, but Cena avenged that loss at Money in the Bank and Battleground.

PHOTO GEORGE NAPOLITANO



SETH ROLLINS vs. JOHN CENA

This was a unique feud where both men can claim bragging rights. Cena defeated Rollins for the U.S. title at SummerSlam, but Rollins managed to keep the World belt away from Cena despite multiple attempts. Rollins rearranged Cena's face with a nose-shattering knee.

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KAZUCHIKA OKADA vs. HIROSHI TANAHASHI

Flair vs. Steamboat. Michaels vs. Hart. Styles vs. Daniels. Okada vs. Tanahashi deserves a place on that list. This feud has been one of the cornerstones of New Japan for the past few years. Their Wrestle Kingdom 9 classic was just the latest chapter in this intense rivalry.

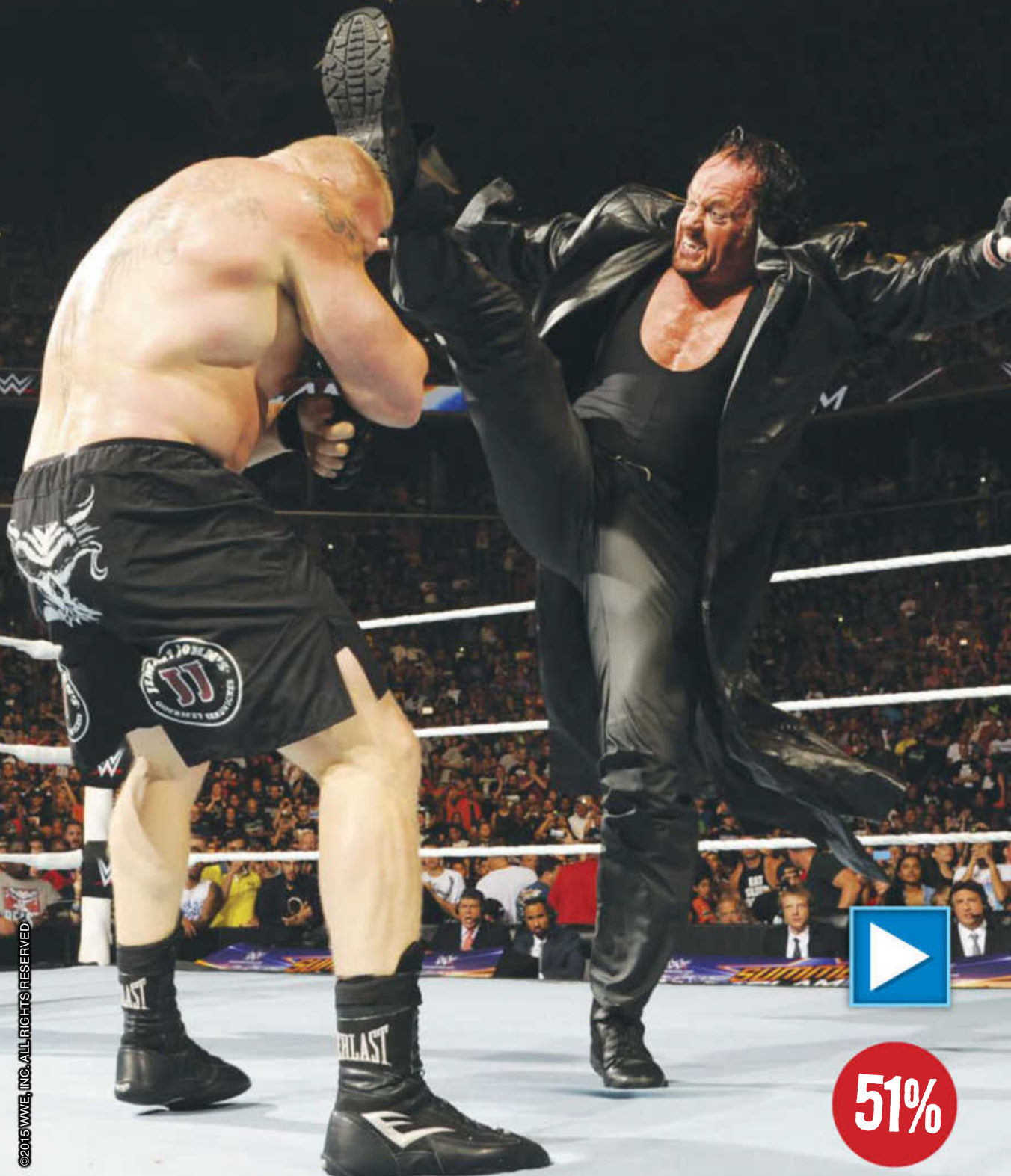
20%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include: Kurt Angle vs. Ethan Carter III, John Cena vs. Rusev, Hardys vs. Wolves, Jay Lethal vs. Roderick Strong, Roman Reigns vs. Triple-H, Rusev vs. Dolph Ziggler, and Bray Wyatt vs. Roman Reigns

FEUD OF THE YEAR

BROCK LESNAR VS THE UNDERTAKER



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51%

Nothing illustrated the divide between the WWE front office and the fans quite like the results in this year's Most Popular Wrestler category.

Our voters overwhelmingly chose Dean Ambrose. Not John Cena. Not Roman Reigns. Not The Undertaker. The bulk of WWE programming was largely built around the triumvirate of Cena, Reigns, and 'Taker, but—for the second consecutive year—*PWI* readers cast their vote for "The Lunatic Fringe." Cena, Reigns, and Undertaker didn't even earn a runner-up spot.

Cena and Reigns continue to experience a backlash because of the perception that they are being forced down the fans' throats. Undertaker was only semi-active, so his absence in this category is less surprising.

But Ambrose's popularity has been organic. The fans have gravitated to him since his days leading The Shield. Now that he's walking the straight and narrow, the fans have embraced him as an anarchic anti-hero. He's not built like a comic book superhero. He's not from a famous wrestling family. He doesn't spout catchphrases. But he exudes a carefree and confident natural charisma that

resonates with the fans.

"When you hear Ambrose's music hit, you feel like anything can happen," wrote Jennifer K. of Ithaca, New York. "He's exciting to watch and always delivers a terrific match."

Throughout the year, Ambrose valiantly battled against the odds, feuding against The Wyatt Family and competing in multiple-man matches (including Money in the Bank and the Elimination Chamber) to try to earn a shot at the WWE title. When Seth Rollins was forced to vacate the title due to injury, Ambrose fought his way to the finals of the title tournament, where he was ultimately defeated by Reigns.

Somewhat surprisingly, the "Lunatic" was gracious in defeat, congratulating Reigns on his win at Survivor Series. It was a refreshing show of sportsmanship, and proof that some friendships are stronger than the quest for gold.

At TLC (and in the thick of the balloting period), Ambrose beat Kevin Owens for the Intercontinental title. It was a worthy consolation prize for a man who had been denied championship gold all year.

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19%

BROCK LESNAR

Lesnar never really had an epiphany or turning point. He was a big bully ... and he still is. His dominance simply won over the fans. Victories over The Big Show and Kofi Kingston didn't hurt his popularity, nor did his association with the entertaining Paul Heyman.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



8%

FINN BALOR

The reigning NXT champion is known for his rousing ring entrances and his elaborate war paint, but he's also one of the most exciting performers to grace an NXT ring since Daniel Bryan was in developmental. A permanent callup to the main roster is not far away.

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



6%

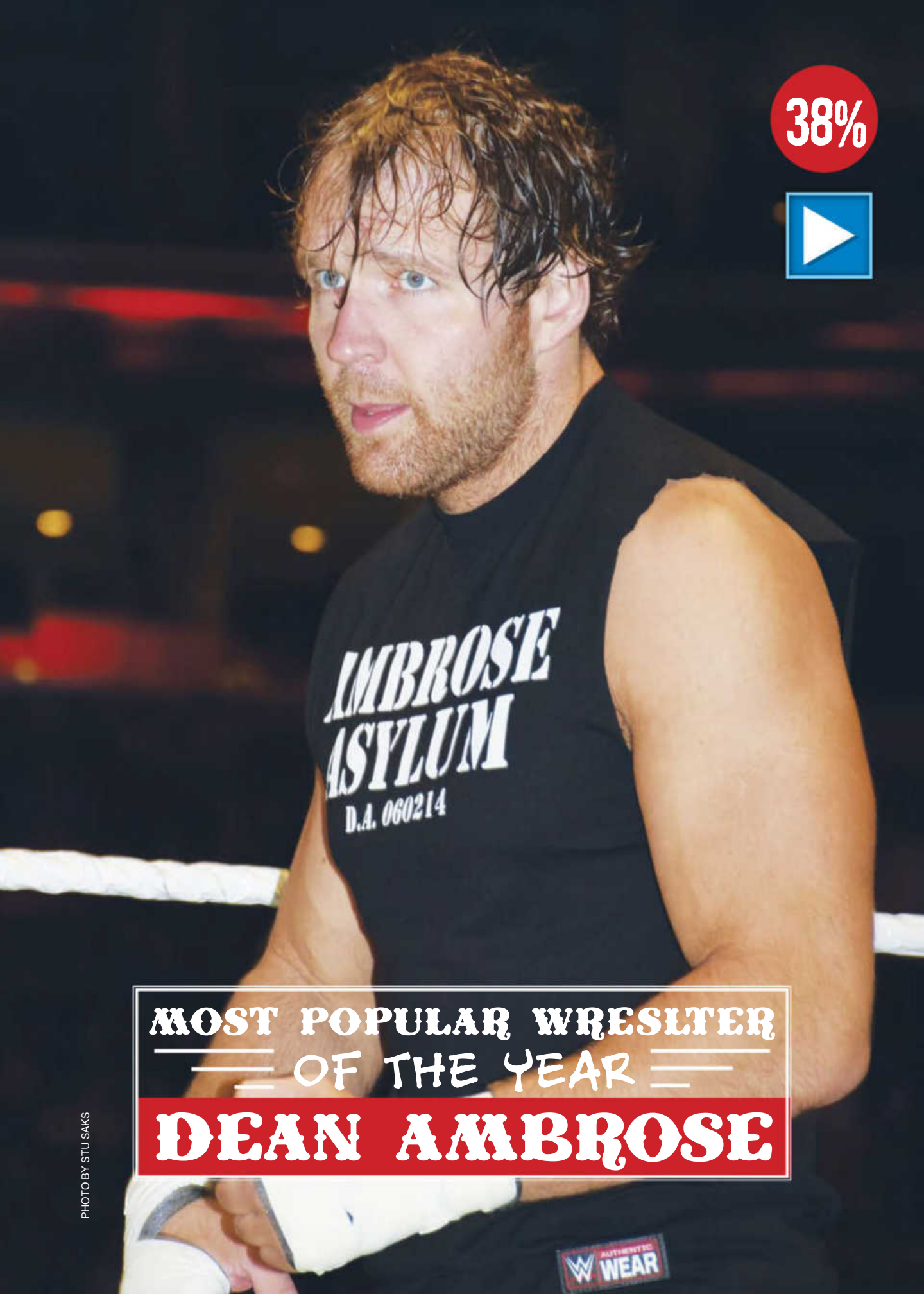
SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

Jim Ross likened his appeal as a cross between Michael Jackson and Freddie Mercury, with a hearty dose of strong style thrown in. The New Japan star is the closest thing wrestling has to a rock star. There is considerable buzz about him being on WWE's radar.

29%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters who did not capture a runner-up spot include: Bayley, Jay Briscoe, John Cena, Roman Reigns, Ryback, The Young Bucks, and Dolph Ziggler



38%



MOST POPULAR WRESTLER
— OF THE YEAR —

DEAN AMBROSE

Seth Rollins had an amazing year ... and he never stopped reminding us about it.

Rollins used his Money in the Bank title shot to force his way into the main event of WrestleMania 31, where he was able to take advantage of Brock Lesnar and Roman Reigns, who had already exhausted each other in a grueling singles battle. Rollins never pinned the champion; he pinned Reigns after Lesnar had inflicted most of the damage.

Rollins was the golden boy handpicked by The Authority to be WWE World champion. The Authority simply handed him a spot in the MITB match last year; Kane played enforcer and ensured a Rollins victory. As champion, he benefited from The Authority's favorable matchmaking and copious amounts of outside interference from J&J Security and Kane.

Rollins didn't care a bit for honor or sportsmanship, yet he still proclaimed himself as being the greatest WWE champion of all-time. Most of what he earned was handed to him on a silver platter by The Authority, but he lacked any sense of humility or modesty.

Unlike his former Shield mates Roman Reigns, Rollins sold out his friends and allies to get his hands on the World title. He repeatedly tried to hospitalize Kane, just as he hospitalized Dean Ambrose last year. His mercenary tactics, greed, and arrogance threatened to overshadow an otherwise extremely impressive year.

Rollins garnered more than one-third of the total votes in the Most Hated category, earning more votes than the top three runners-up combined. He absolutely dominated the voting ... even though the balloting took place while he was recuperating from a torn ACL and MCL. Almost any other athlete in that situation would be seen as a sympathetic figure. Not Rollins. Even a serious injury couldn't temper the hatred the majority of fans have for him.

"I respect him as a wrestler, but as a person, he's scum," wrote Jonathan S. of Glenwillow, Ohio. "The infuriating thing is that he really has the talent to be one of the best of all-time, but he's so busy taking shortcuts and trying to intentionally injure his opponents that he still hasn't achieved his full potential."

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



15%

KEVIN OWENS

Owens is brash, brutish, and outspoken. He doesn't give a damn what anyone thinks about him, not the fans nor his peers. To him, championships just mean a bigger payday. He has no sense of honor and absolutely no compassion. He's a prizefighter in every sense.

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHTNA WRESTLING



10%

ETHAN CARTER III

Born with a silver spoon in his mouth, ECIII was an entitled, disrespectful ruffian who ran roughshod over TNA this year. He bullied Rockstar Spud and Jeremy Borash, relied on Aunt Dixie to protect him, and used a legal loophole to overturn the result of Bound for Glory.

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



6%

BRAY WYATT

The mad patriarch of the Wyatt clan continued his brand of vigilante justice, reuniting the family (and adding Braun Strowman) to wage war against his personal targets. Wyatt was repelled by Kane and Undertaker, but every loss compelled him to become more vicious next time.

35%

**VOTE FOR
OTHERS**

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include: The Authority, Big Show, John Cena, Brock Lesnar, Eva Marie, The Miz, Roman Reigns, Rusev, Sheamus, and Eric Young

34%



MOST
HATED
WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR

**SETH
ROLLINS**

For the first time in the 44-year history of *PWI* Achievement Awards, a women's match has been voted Match of the Year.

At NXT TakeOver: Brooklyn in August, Bayley defeated Sasha Banks in a thrilling bout for the NXT Women's title. The match that was hailed at the time as a Match of the Year candidate. As it turned out, it would have to settle for second place.

The rematch was *that* good.

At NXT TakeOver: Respect, on October 7, Bayley put her newly won title on the line against the former champion in a 30-minute Iron Man match. The match was critical for Bayley, who wanted to prove her previous win over Banks wasn't a fluke.

The two women started slowly, knowing they were in for a 30-minute marathon. "The Boss" scored the first fall, capitalizing on an out-of-position referee to poke Bayley in the eye and taking the pin. Bayley evened the score a few minutes later when she caught Banks off the ropes and landed a Bayley-to-Belly suplex for a three-count.

The match spilled to the floor, where "The Boss"

regained the upper hand. Banks slammed Bayley into the stage area, then re-entered the ring, winning the third fall by countout. Banks also took that opportunity to taunt Izzy, the Bayley superfan sitting at ringside, causing the little girl to break into tears as Bayley rallied to recover.

Up one fall, Banks methodically worked over Bayley, looking to run out the clock and reclaim the title. Bayley found an opening and surprised Banks with a cradle, capturing the fourth fall and tying the match at two falls apiece.

For the last 10 minutes of the match, Banks and Bayley traded big-time finishers and submission holds in a frantic attempt to gain the deciding final fall. Banks caught Bayley in the Banks Statement, but Bayley refused to quit and managed to escape the hold. Banks went for a lung-blower, but Bayley somehow managed to roll through the move and catch Banks in a modified armbar/choke combination. With just three seconds remaining, Banks tapped out, giving the match to Bayley.

Triple-H and the entire NXT roster came out to applaud both women for an unforgettable bout.

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15%

BAYLEY vs. SASHA BANKS

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



11%

**BROCK LESNAR vs. JOHN CENA
vs. SETH ROLLINS**

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9%

KEVIN OWENS vs. JOHN CENA

Their initial encounter, in front of a packed Barclays Center on August 22, is considered a breakthrough match for women's wrestling. A decided underdog, Bayley hit a reverse huricranana from the turnbuckles and a Bayley-to-Belly to capture the NXT Women's title.

This triple-threat match at the Royal Rumble on January 25 saw Lesnar successfully defend his WWE championship, as "The Beast" countered a Curb Stomp attempt into a F5 on Rollins for the win. It was an exciting match between three of WWE's greatest talents.

Owens is known to talk a pretty big game, but he also has a knack for backing up his boasts. That's what he did at Elimination Chamber on May 31 when he scored a clean pinfall over the heavily favored John Cena in a physical and intense battle.

41%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS {

Some of the other top vote-getters that did not capture a runner-up spot include Hiroshi Tanahashi vs. Kazuchika Okada (1/4), Shinsuke Nakamura vs. Kota Ibushi (1/4), John Cena vs. Kevin Owens (6/14), Jay Lethal vs. Jay Briscoe (6/19), Ethan Carter III vs. Kurt Angle (6/25), John Cena vs. Cesaro (6/29), Roderick Strong vs. Jay Lethal (7/24), Brock Lesnar vs. The Undertaker (10/25)

24%



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MATCH OF THE YEAR
BAYLEY VS SASHA BANKS

The results are in and it's official: New Day does, in fact, rock.

When The New Day formed in late-2014, Big E, Kofi Kingston, and Xavier Woods were languishing in the undercard. Kingston—a four-time Intercontinental champion and three-time U.S. champion—had slipped entirely out of title contention. Big E—a former NXT and Intercontinental champion—had lost all momentum. Somehow Woods, an unproven newcomer to WWE, managed to reinvigorate both men.

The New Day started as a Gospel-inspired outfit proclaiming the good news of a new day, but it wasn't until all three men decided to get a bit silly that the trio really took off. Big E and Kingston defeated Cesaro and Tyson Kidd for the WWE tag team title at Extreme Rules, and the two shared the championship glory with Woods, utilizing the "Freebird Rule" (whereby a third member of a group is also allowed to defend a tag team championship). Ironically, the makeup of The New Day is quite similar to the successful formula the Freebirds perfected: Big E fills the Terry Gordy role as power merchant, Kingston

is the veteran and ring general a la Buddy Roberts, and Woods has the supreme confidence (and perfect hair) of Michael Hayes.

The New Day had a particularly impressive outing at The Elimination Chamber PPV, where they retained the title in an elimination match that also included The Prime Time Players, The Ascension, The Lucha Dragons, Kidd and Cesaro, and Los Matadores. The New Day dropped the belts to The Prime Time Players at Money in the Bank, but rebounded to win them back at SummerSlam. In their most impressive test, The New Day turned back the challenge of the returning Dudley Boyz, successfully defending the tag belts against the former WWE, ECW, WCW, TNA, and IWGP tag team champions. Not only did The New Day defeat The Dudleys, they did it with confidence and swagger.

In addition to racking up wins over WWE's top tandems, The New Day also become one of the company's top acts, thanks to Woods' trombone instrumentation, some entertaining interviews, and Big E's strangely compelling dance moves.

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



MATT & NICK JACKSON

With success in New Japan and all over the United States independent scene and Japan, The Young Bucks are one of the most decorated (and popular) duos in wrestling. The Jacksons have been superkicking opponents all over the globe, and the fans have taken notice.

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING



**EDDIE EDWARDS &
DAVEY RICHARDS**

The Wolves captured the TNA tag team title three times in 2015. The duo was beset by injuries, but overcame them to establish themselves as TNA's most dominant tandem of the year. It's a testament to their friendship that they are not afraid to wrestle each other.

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



**KYLE O'REILLY &
BOBBY FISH**

The three-time Ring of Honor tag champions and two-time IWGP junior tag team champions had another solid year on both sides of the globe. Their "Chasing The Dragon" double-team finisher is one of the most impressive and effective moves in wrestling.

21%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS

Some of the other top vote-getters who did not capture a runner-up spot include: Karl Anderson & Doc Gallows, Lance Archer & Davey Boy Smith Jr., Jay & Mark Briscoe, Cesaro & Tyson Kidd, Christopher Daniels & Frankie Kazarian, Matt Taven & Michael Bennett, and Darren Young & Titus O'Neil

45%



TAG TEAM
OF THE YEAR

THE
NEW
DAY

PHOTO BY JOHN SMOLEK

His tactics may have been questionable, but his accomplishments were beyond compare. With 62 percent of the vote in his favor, Seth Rollins was the clear choice as 2015's Wrestler of the Year.

Rollins held the WWE World championship for 221 days during the calendar year, from when he shocked the world and cashed in his Money in the Bank title shot in the middle of the main event of WrestleMania 31, to when he was forced to relinquish the title due to injury on November 5.

As World champion, Rollins managed to turn back challenges from an elite list of opponents, including Randy Orton, Brock Lesnar, John Cena, Dean Ambrose, Kane, and Sting. Though he frequently flouted the rules, relied on The Authority for interference and preferential treatment, and preserved his title through intentional DQs, those tactics were largely a smokescreen. Rollins was masterful in many matches that were unmarred by outside interference or other shenanigans. He proved to be the most successful, active, and long-lasting WWE champion since CM Punk's reign in 2012. By the time

he vacated the title, even his most vocal critics had to admit that the self-professed "Architect" of The Shield was a worthy World champ.

His impressive WWE title run wasn't Rollins' only noteworthy accomplishment in 2015. He defeated Cena for the U.S. title at SummerSlam, becoming the first wrestler ever to hold those two championships simultaneously. He was named number-one in the 2015 "PWI 500." He had a rivalry with Jon Stewart that saw him appear on *The Daily Show* and led to Stewart interfering on his behalf at SummerSlam. He even had a statue commissioned in his honor by The Authority (though Sting saw to it that the statue was never erected at WWE Headquarters).

By any objective standard, Rollins was WWE's Most Valuable Player of 2015. He was one of WWE's best in-ring performers and was the company's most successful star until he was sidelined by injury. Even though he was also voted Most Hated by a significant margin, our respondents clearly respect Rollins' abilities and his breakout performance this year.

PHOTO BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/RING OF HONOR



15%

JAY LETHAL

Lethal became a double-champion this year, holding both the ROH TV and heavyweight titles. While he has been a respected wrestler for years, this year he proved he can be "The Man" as the standard-bearer for ROH. No one will mistake him for comic relief again.

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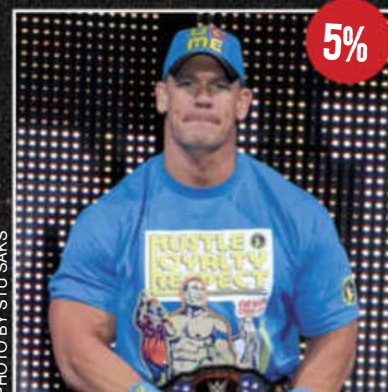


12%

ROMAN REIGNS

The road wasn't easy, but Reigns managed to take it all the way to the WWE World championship. Reigns won the Royal Rumble, headlined WrestleMania, won a tourney for the vacant title, beat the tar out of Triple-H, and recaptured the belt on *Raw*. Not too shabby!

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



5%

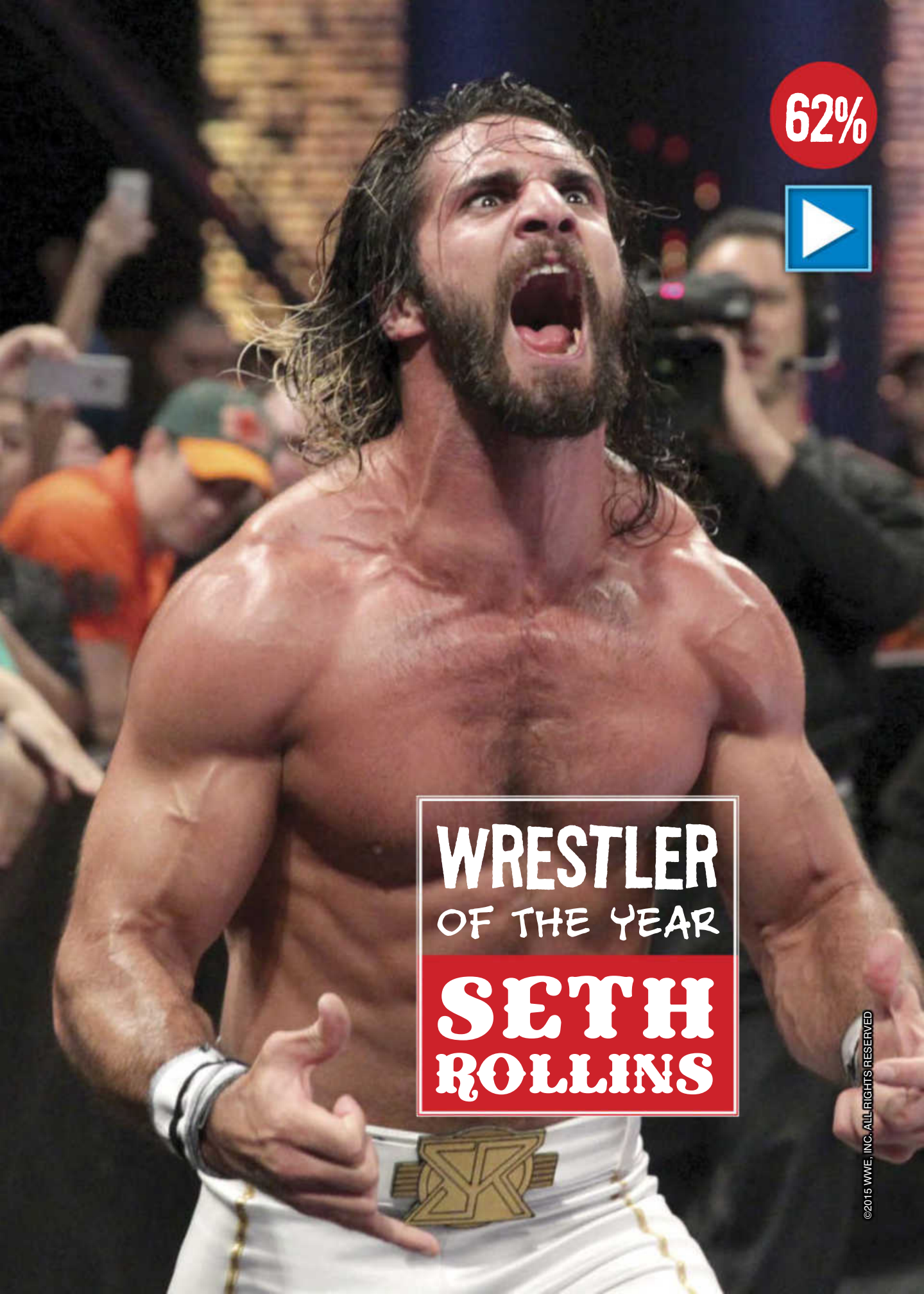
JOHN CENA

Cena's "U.S. Open" series resulted in some of the most exciting matches of the year and elevated the prestige of the U.S. title, making a long-neglected secondary title one of the most valued prizes in wrestling. Even without the World title, Cena remained the man to beat in WWE.

6%

VOTE FOR
OTHERS

Some of the other top vote-getters who did not capture a runner-up spot include: Alberto El Patron, Ethan Carter III, Brock Lesnar, Shinsuke Nakamura, Kazuchika Okada, Kevin Owens, Prince Puma, Roderick Strong, and AJ Styles



62%



WRESTLER
OF THE YEAR

SETH
ROLLINS

RODDY PIPER

"Ever forward" was one of "Rowdy" Roddy Piper's favorite phrases, something that he would often scribble on autograph pictures or use as a closer in his e-mail messages. That phrase reflected the mindset that helped Piper excel in so many facets of wrestling and entertainment.

It also reflects the reason why *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* is posthumously honoring Piper as the 35th recipient of the Stanley Weston Award, named after the founder of this magazine.

Piper would have been a worthy recipient, even if he hadn't passed away unexpectedly on July 31, leaving behind wife Kitty, four children, and four grandchildren. Yet it never seemed appropriate to single out Piper for lifetime achievement recognition because he remained a contemporary, relevant figure. Although his in-ring days were long over, he could pop up anywhere, anytime, conducting a "Piper's Pit" with John Cena live on *Monday Night Raw*, making a cameo appearance on *The Jimmy Kimmel Show*, or shopping for a new home on *Celebrity House Hunters*.

The skinny kid from Western Canada had an uncanny knack for adaptation and survival. While Piper had some basic athletic ability when he broke into the business in 1970, he utilized his only real skill—playing the bagpipes—as a gimmick to sustain himself, even if it meant wearing a kilt and incurring the ridicule of his often-merciless older peers. His big mouth got him into trouble, yet also got him out of trouble many times.

As a heel, he made fans hate him by overselling his rather average physical attributes. As a fan favorite, he sold his vulnerability, making fans root for him and fear for his safety at the same time. He turned his weaknesses into strengths. Defeating Hodgkin's lymphoma only seemed to make him stronger in recent years.

Piper always evoked emotional intensity, which made his feuds especially memorable. He played "*La Cucaracha*" on his bagpipes to infuriate the Guerreros in Los Angeles, mocked Buddy Rose's appearance in Portland, offered Jack and Jerry Brisco a bottle of Jack Daniel's as a peace offering in Raleigh, and did his best to cause family friction among the Armstrongs in Atlanta.

These experiences girded Piper for some of wrestling's greatest battles, whether it was his dog-collar match against Greg Valentine at Starrcade '83, the "War To Settle The Score" against WWF champ Hulk Hogan on MTV, or his Intercontinental title defense against Bret

Hart at WrestleMania 8. And there were the spectacles: the coconut shot to "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka, roughing up Cyndi Lauper, boxing Mr. T, and chasing Goldust down the highway in a white Ford Bronco.

Piper gave us some of the most unforgettable moments in wrestling history. And he parlayed the mainstream fame he earned during the "Rock 'n' Wrestling" era into a career that transcended wrestling. He earned acclaim in John Carpenter's 1988 film *They Live* and many other action movies.

That didn't mean Piper wasn't critical of the business. In his 2002 autobiography, *In The Pit With Piper*, he discussed "The Sickness," referring to wrestlers' willingness to abuse themselves for fame and acceptance, the false sense of invincibility they often develop, and how these unhealthy traits leave them open to manipulation by promoters.

His outspokenness during a 2003 interview with HBO's *Real Sports* got him fired from WWE ... and it wouldn't be the last time. He held the business accountable for both the triumphs and sorrows of his life. In so doing, he brought us both joy and tears.

Roddy Piper never claimed to be perfect, but his heart was always in the right place. Ever forward, "Hot Rod."



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

PHOTO BY JOE VALLEE



MICK FOLEY STARS IN THE GREAT CHICKEN WING CAPER

Hardcore icon/chicken wing aficionado Mick Foley competed in Wing Bowl 23, a chicken wing eating contest in Philadelphia in January. Foley bit off more than he could chew, though, and got busted cheating, stashing uneaten wings in his fanny pack to earn an ignominious DQ. How did he think he could get away with it? He probably figured that everyone's eyes would be glued to the attractive young "Wingettes" behind him.

FULL-BLUED ITALIANS?

PHOTO BY PARRISVSTEFANOW.COM



ECW alums Little Guido and The Blue Meanie reunited at ECW Arena in June for Wrestling With Disaster's Final Cut event. Guido and Meanie teamed with Al Snow to form "The F.B.W.O. Squad," ECW's answer to a supergroup.

PHOTO BY ROB MYERS



THE ROCKETTES HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR

A superkick party broke out at the SHIMMER DVD tapings in November when all decided to simultaneously put their best foot forward. Four high kicks and four sore midsections.



AND NOW FOR YOUR MOMENT OF ZEN ...

In his first major gig since stepping down from *The Daily Show*, Jon Stewart served as special guest host for SummerSlam, but he had a hands-on approach to his hosting duties. Stewart stunned the world when he interfered in the main event match between John Cena and Seth Rollins, blasting Cena with a chair and helping Rollins retain the title. Who would have pegged Stewart as an Authority guy?

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SHOOTING BLANKS



Luke Harper puts former Wyatt Family brother Erick Rowan in the cross-hairs, but the squabbles between the buzzard-followers proved to be short-lived. By the end of the year, Harper, Rowan, Wyatt, and newcomer Braun Strowman were one happy, demented, Undertaker-kidnapping family once again.

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



PHOTO BY STEVE ARGINTARU

HOT STUFF COMING THROUGH

The Pan-Am Games were a big deal in Toronto this year, and Trish Stratus couldn't resist getting in on the action. The seven-time WWE Women's champion carried the Pan-Am Games Torch in her hometown of Richmond Hill, Ontario, to help kick off the games. Trish doesn't look like she's lost a step.

≡AAA TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Mega ¹	—	—	—
Tag Team	Angelico & Jack Evans	Joe Lider & Pentagon Jr.	10.04.15 ²

¹ Vacated by Alberto El Patron, November 9, 2015

² Match included Daga & Steve Pain

YEAR IN REVIEW

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DADDY'S GOLDEN GIRL

The Flair family collected yet another championship at Night of Champions when Charlotte ended Nikki Bella's record-setting Divas title reign. "The Nature Boy" couldn't have been more pleased.

EVERYONE YOU MEET. THEY'RE JAMMING IN THE STREET. ALL NIGHT LONG ...

PHOTO BY STEVE ARGINTARU



Jimmy Korderas, Rich Swann, and Sebastian Suave take a moment to get down with their bad selves after a SMASH Wrestling show in Toronto. No one can resist the smooth jams of Lionel Richie.

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



PICKING UP SOME KOFI FOR THE PARTY

Kofi Kingston has made a reputation for his creative ways to stave off elimination at the Royal Rumble, but at the 2015 Rumble, he got an assist from the Rosebuds, who caught him, carried him around the ring, and hoisted him back into the match ... only to get eliminated moments later.

≡ ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING TITLE CHANGES ≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Triple Crown	Go Shiozaki	Joe Doering	01.03.15
Tag Team	Akebono & Yutaka Yoshie	Jun Akiyama & Takao Omori	03.22.15
Junior Heavyweight	Kotaro Suzuki	Atsushi Aoki	03.27.15 ¹
Tag Team	Go Shiozaki & Kento Miyahara	Akebono & Yutaka Yoshie	05.06.15 ²
Triple Crown	Akebono	Go Shiozaki	05.21.15
Triple Crown	Jun Akiyama	Akebono	11.01.15

¹Title declared vacant on November 15, 2015, with the resignation of Suzuki

²Title declared vacant on September 28, 2015, with the resignation of Shiozaki

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ANOTHER CHAMPIONSHIP VACATED

On the May 11 edition of **Raw**, Daniel Bryan announced he had to vacate the Intercontinental championship due to injury, almost one year from the date he was forced to relinquish the WWE World championship (May 12, 2014), also due to injury. Bryan diagnosed with a major concussion and the WWE doctor has not cleared him to return to action.

OK. WE ADMIT IT ... WE'RE INTRIGUED ABOUT THE NEW ODD COUPLE REBOOT

PHOTO BY SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



Airing exclusively on Sinclair Broadcasting, natch.

REMEMBERING A TRUE WARRIOR

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



At the 2015 WWE Hall of Fame ceremony, Dana, the wife of the late Ultimate Warrior, presented the first Warrior Award to Connor "The Crusher" Michalek, honoring the memory of the eight-year-old fan who succumbed to cancer in April. "Connor was a glorious example of the impact a little warrior can have in this world," Dana said. "I have no doubt when Connor reached heaven, my husband shook the ropes to welcome him home."

≡CMLL TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Heavyweight	Maximo	El Terrible	01.30.15
Women	Marcela	Syuri	04.10.15

YEAR IN REVIEW



PHOTO BY MIKE LANO

PAGING DR. YANKEM

We know he calls himself the "War Pig," but Jody Kristofferson is going a bit overboard with his wild boar teeth. It does look slightly more intimidating than his original idea of a pink prosthetic curly tail.



PHOTO BY WAYNE MCCARTY

"WAKE ME WHEN IT'S MATCH TIME"

CHIKARA referee Bryce Remsburg takes advantage of Juan Francisco de Coronado's infamously lengthy ring entrance to grab a quick catnap in the corner. Even refs need their beauty sleep.



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PRINCE PRETTY THROWS SOME "BLUE STEEL" OUT ON HIS INSTY

Don't get the reference? Googs it, folks. Googs it.

FROM SCOTLAND WITH LOVE



PHOTO BY STEVE ARGINTARU

It was love at first sight when Grado met Seleziya Sparx at a Superkick'd event in Toronto. The Scottish sensation was so smitten that he immediately dropped to a knee and proposed marriage. Unfortunately, there was no love connection to be made.

≡EVOLVE TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Heavyweight	Timothy Thatcher	Drew Galloway	07.10.15

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



APPARENTLY, TRIPLE-H CAN BEHEAD INDESTRUCTIBLE CYBORGS BY THE SCORE ... YET HE STILL NEEDS A SLEDGEHAMMER AND OUTSIDE INTERFERENCE FROM DX TO BEAT A 56-YEAR-OLD SEMI-RETIRED STING

Maybe Skynet isn't as scary as we thought. Or maybe DX is humanity's last hope. Scary stuff, indeed.

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



A MORTIFIED DDP SUDDENLY REALIZES THAT, WHILE GOOD FORM IN YOGA, KEEPING ONE'S GLUTES LOOSE MAY PRESENT CERTAIN CHALLENGES WHILE WRESTLING ...

Especially if he tried the tacos at catering. Bang!

≡ LUCHA UNDERGROUND TITLE CHANGES ≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Heavyweight	Mil Muertes	Prince Puma	04.19.15
Trios	Barrio Negro, El Sinestro, & Trece	Angelico, Ivelisse, & Son of Havoc	04.18.15
Heavyweight	Fenix	Mil Muertes	11.22.15
Trios	Angelico, Ivelisse, & Son of Havoc	Barrio Negro, El Sinestro, & Trece	11.22.15
Heavyweight	Mantanza	—	12.12.15 ¹

¹20-man elimination match

YEAR IN REVIEW

TOOTING THEIR OWN HORN



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Take three slumping wrestlers, give them a trombone, and allow them to shake their booties a little bit, and you've got all the makings of a Tag Team of the Year. Toot that horn, New Day ... you deserve it.

THIS IS THE
REASON NO
ONE LIKES
TO SHARE
S'MORES
WITH MARK
HENRY



PHOTO BY STU SAKS



PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHWORTH/TNA WRESTLING

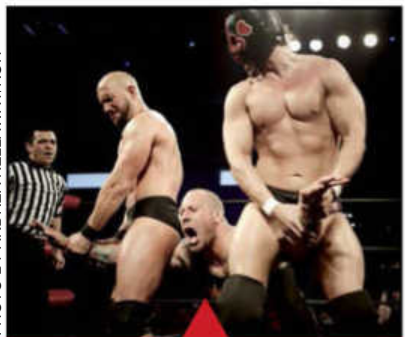
Matt Hardy soaks in the spotlight with his son, Maxel, after winning the TNA heavyweight title at Bound for Glory. It was a heartwarming moment, but Hardy's reign proved to be brief. He relinquished the title the following day after Ethan Carter III filed an injunction preventing Hardy from appearing on *Impact*.

A FAMILY
AFFAIR

NEW JAPAN PRO WRESTLING TITLE CHANGES

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Junior Heavyweight	Kenny Omega	Ryusuke Taguchi	01.04.15
Tag Team	Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shabata	Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson	01.04.15
Tag Team	Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson	Hirooki Goto & Katsuyori Shabata	02.11.15
IWGP Heavyweight	AJ Styles	Hiroshi Tanahashi	02.11.15
Tag Team	Matt Taven & Michael Bennett	Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson	04.05.15
Intercontinental	Hirooki Goto	Shinsuke Nakamura	05.03.15
Tag Team	Doc Gallows & Karl Anderson	Matt Taven & Michael Bennett	07.05.15
Junior Heavyweight	KUSHIDA	Kenny Omega	07.05.15
IWGP Heavyweight	Kazuchika Okada	AJ Styles	07.05.15
Junior Heavyweight	Kenny Omega	KUSHIDA	09.23.15
Intercontinental	Shinsuke Nakamura	Hirooki Goto	09.27.15

PHOTO BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/ROH



"HEY, ARE WE SUPPOSED TO TWIST CLOCKWISE OR COUNTER-CLOCKWISE? I'M ALL MIXED UP OVER HERE. I'M PRETTY SURE WE'RE JUST GIVING THIS GUY A SHOULDER MASSAGE."

The match was bound to have a happy ending.

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DEAN AMBROSE CERTAINLY KNOWS HOW TO GENERATE HEAT

It's easy. Just turn up the thermostat. Really, why do some folks struggle so much with it?

PHOTO BY JERRY VILLAGRANA/RING OF HONOR



NOT ONLY IS THE GAS MASK STYLISH. BUT IT'S ALSO A LIFESAVER FOR THOSE DAYS WHEN HANSON FORGETS TO WASH HIS STINKY RING GEAR

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50 SHADES OF ZIGGLER

Dolph Ziggler locks lips with Lana. The two had a brief dalliance over the summer, until Lana announced on social media that she had become engaged to Rusev. Poor Dolph, he has such lousy luck with the ladies.

≡NWA TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Women	Santana Garrett	Barbi Hayden	07.07.15
Heavyweight	Hiroiyoshi Tenzan	Rob Conway	02.14.15
Junior Heavyweight	Steve Anthony	Jushin Liger	04.13.15
Heavyweight	Jax Dane	Hiroiyoshi Tenzan	08.29.15
Junior Heavyweight	Tiger Mask IV	Steve Anthony	09.23.15
Tag Team	Matt Sigmon & Elliot Russell	Lance Archer & Davey Boy Smith Jr.	10.10.15
Tag Team	Matt Riviera & Rob Conway	Matt Sigmon & Elliot Russell	12.04.15
Women	Amber O'Neal	Santana Garrett	12.18.15 ¹

¹Match included Brie Ann & Nikki Knight

YEAR IN REVIEW

PHOTO BY STU SAKS



A PERFECT 10 ... AND A SOLID 7. MAYBE A 7.5 ON A GOOD DAY

NXT's resident "Perfect 10" Tye Dillinger criticizes the apparel of the former voice of ECW, Joey Styles. Perhaps Dillinger still harbors some bitterness over all things "Extreme" since his forgettable run as Gavin Spears in WWE's version of ECW in 2008.

PHOTO BY BLAKE THOMAS/BLIZ PHOTOGRAPHY



IT'S OFFICIAL: TAILS ARE IN THIS SEASON

In the wild, tails have plenty of uses. In the ring ... they're decidedly less practical. But they're definitely a fashion statement. Here, Solo Darling models her bushy bum blanket and Space Monkey—Mr. 500 in the 2015 "*PWI 500*"—uses his prehensile branch-grabber to perch up on the turnbuckles, where he enjoys some celebratory bananas.

PHOTO BY ROBB VANDERSTOEL



PHOTOS BY ANDREA KELLAWAY/RING OF HONOR



ARE JAY LETHAL AND MARIA KANELIS COMPETING FOR A TITLE WE DON'T KNOW ABOUT?

≡NXT TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Tag Team	Wesley Blake & Buddy Murphy	Kalisto & Sin Cara	01.15.15
Heavyweight	Kevin Owens	Sami Zayn	02.11.15
Women	Sasha Banks	Charlotte	02.11.15 ¹
Heavyweight	Finn Balor	Kevin Owens	07.04.15
Tag Team	Aiden English & Simon Gotch	Blake & Murphy	08.22.15
Women	Bayley	Sasha Banks	08.22.15
Tag Team	Scott Dawson & Dash Wilder	Aiden English & Simon Gotch	10.22.15

¹Match included Bayley & Becky Lynch

STE-FIT-NEE McMAHON

Not only is she a “Billion-Dollar Princess,” but Stephanie McMahon is also a major fitness buff. This year, she released her own fitness DVD for full-body flexibility and cardio training. It received some pretty great reviews ... at least from everyone on the WWE payroll who relies on Stephanie to sign their paychecks.

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AND THE COW OF HONOR IS ... STEVE CORINO!

When Ring of Honor held its Field of Honor event at MCU Park in Brooklyn, New York, in August, a new mascot named Honor Cow showed up to greet fans and run a race around the bases against crowd favorite Cheeseburger. But when the Honor Cow cheated to get the advantage, Cheeseburger was able to unmask the bovine blowhard, revealing announcer-Steve Corino in the cow suit. To think, he would have gotten away with it, if not for that meddling Cheeseburger ...

PHOTOS BY DANNY BAXTER/RING OF HONOR



©2015 TONY KNOX

CHANNELING HIS INNER FRED BLASSIE

Eric Young gnaws on Tommy Dreamer's forehead during a bloody hardcore bout. Blassie would be proud; Dreamer always seemed like a pencil-necked geek.

≡PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Tag Team	Ethan Page & Josh Alexander	Joey Ryan & Candice LeRae	05.22.15
Tag Team	Alex Reynolds & John Silver	Ethan Page & Josh Alexander	05.22.15
Tag Team	Andrew Everett & Trevor Lee	Alex Reynolds & John Silver	05.22.15
Tag Team	Matt & Nick Jackson	Andrew Everett & Trevor Lee	06.26.15

YEAR IN REVIEW

PHOTO BY PARRIS/STEFANOW.COM



**THE LESSON TO BE LEARNED
HERE: NEVER PUT A DOG
COLLAR ON A RHYNO**

©2015 TONY KNOX



**REGISTERING
THE PAIN IN
3 ... 2 ... 1 ...**

TNA Knockouts champion Taryn Terrell is all smiles prior to her title defense against Angelina Love in Glasgow, Scotland, but this before-the-bell forearm shot to her kidney is about to change her mood in a hurry. How can such a Beautiful Person use such ugly tactics?

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



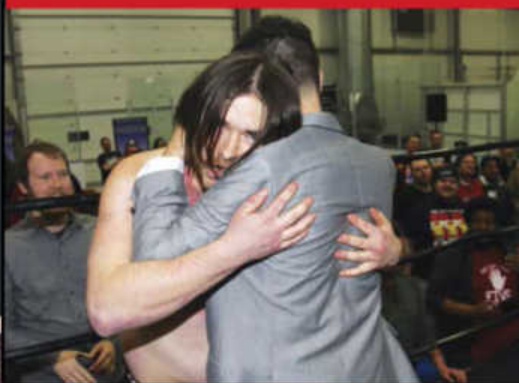
**EITHER BACK-
LUND'S OFF HIS
MEDS AGAIN OR
HOWDY DOODY
JUST CRASHED
THE HALL OF FAME
CEREMONY**

≧PRO WRESTLING NOAH TITLE CHANGES≦

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Tag Team	Mikey Nicholls & Shane Haste	Masato Tanaka & Takashi Sugiura	01.10.15
Tag Team	Lance Archer & Davey Boy Smith Jr.	Mikey Nicholls & Shane Haste	02.11.15
Junior Heavyweight	Taichi	Atsushi Kotoge	03.15.15
Global Honored Crown	Minoru Suzuki	Naomichi Marufuji	03.15.15



DO NOT ATTEMPT
THIS AT HOME!



PHOTOS BY STEVE ARGINTARU

What was Smash Wrestling ring hand Trevor Rollings thinking when he offered his "100-Chop Challenge" to fans and wrestlers. A guy who works for the promotion (not a wrestler, but apparently trained) volunteered to take 100 chops from fans and wrestlers. Trevor was looking pretty cocky when female fan Mara Michelina gave him a weak tap. By the time Josh Alexander delivered his chop, Rollings was a mess. Trevor is comforted by ring announcer Scott Hunter after the decision was made (not by Trevor, mind you!) to call off the challenge at the 50 mark.

≡ ROH TITLE CHANGES ≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Tag Team	Christopher Daniels & Frankie Kazarian	Kyle O'Reilly & Bobby Fish	04.15.15
Heavyweight	Jay Lethal	Jay Briscoe	06.19.15
Tag Team	Matt Taven & Michael Bennett	Christopher Daniels & Frankie Kazarian	09.18.15
TV	Roderick Strong	Jay Lethal	10.23.15
Tag Team	Hanson & Raymond Rowe	Matt Taven & Michael Bennett	12.18.15

YEAR IN REVIEW

GETTING THE RUG PULLED OUT FROM UNDER HIM



PHOTOS BY WAYNE MCCARTY

John Johnson sent Ariya Daivari on a magic carpet ride when he yanked up Daivari's prayer rug and sent him flying at this Prime Time Wrestling event. We've said it before and we'll say it again: Wrestling and religion just don't mix.

HECHO EN MEXICO ... PERO TRABAJA EN AMERICA OTRA VEZ

PHOTO BY JERRY VILLAGRANA/RING OF HONOR



It's about time for Alberto Del Rio to update that tattoo ...

PHOTOS BY WAYNE MCCARTY



JACK WALTZ WOULD HAVE BEEN HORRIFIED

Prime Time Wrestling champion Darin Corbin came to the ring wearing this prop because the fans said he horsed around too much. He didn't wrestle the whole match with it on, but he did put it on for a few horse headbutts.

≡SHIMMER TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Tag Team	Cherry Bomb & Kimber Lee	Kellie Skater & Tomoka Nakagawa	04.11.15
Singles	Madison Eagles	Nicole Matthews	10.10.15

THE YEAR IN NUMBERS

2 Length, in days, of Matt Hardy's TNA heavyweight title reign. Hardy won the championship at Bound for Glory but relinquished the belt two days later when former champion Ethan Carter III filed a lawsuit challenging the validity of the title change.

2.15 The rating of the December 7 edition of *Raw*. The number represented the lowest *Raw* ratings since 1997, sparking debate among fans, media, and wrestlers about the state of WWE programming.

3 Billed weight, in "golden bananas," of Space Monkey, number 500 in the 2015 "PWI 500."

5:15 Length of Roman Reigns' first WWE World championship reign, from when he pinned Dean Ambrose to when he was pinned by Sheamus at Survivor Series.



9 Number of stitches Brock Lesnar required after suffering a gash to the head during his Hell in a Cell match against The Undertaker.

47:29 Length of time Bray Wyatt lasted in the 2015 Royal Rumble. Wyatt, who entered the match at number five, survived longer than anyone else, but was eventually eliminated by The Big Show and Kane.

58 Total number of matches Daniel Bryan wrestled in 2015. Bryan returned to the ring from injury on January 13. He wrestled his last match of the year on April 14.

60 Special sale price, in dollars, of a guitar featuring a laser-engraved portrait of Jeff Jarrett, available through www.shoptna.com.

185 Number of consecutive minutes Chris Hero wrestled in SMASH Wrestling's "Infinity Gauntlet" fundraiser for ALS. Hero agreed to wrestle 30 minutes for every \$5,000 raised. He wrestled 17 matches over a three-hour span and raised \$3,440.



301 Number of days Nikki Bella held the WWE Divas championship, breaking the previous record of 295 days set by AJ Lee.

76,976 Announced attendance of WrestleMania 31 at Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California. The event drew a reported \$12.6-million in revenue.

100,000,000 Amount, in dollars, of the lawsuit filed by Hulk Hogan against Gawker for releasing a sex tape made with Heather Clem without Hogan's permission.

YEAR IN REVIEW

PHOTO BY STEVE ARGINTARU



CATCHING RUSH FLUSH IN THE MUSH

Penelope Ford catches Courtney Rush in the face with a well-placed dropkick. Rush got the last laugh, though, as she rallied back to win the match ... despite having Ford's sneaker-tread marks bruised into her face.

PHOTO BY ZACHERY JOHNATHAN SOUL



EVEN CHAMPIONS HAVE TO KEEP UP WITH THE YARDWORK

AIW Intense champion Gregory Iron takes a moment from mowing the lawn to greet a fan passing by. We're glad to see he didn't let his new championship go to his head.

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

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UNLIKELY ADVERSARIES. UNCOMMON VIOLENCE

Ethan Carter III made plenty of enemies during his reign as TNA champion, but two of his biggest rivals turned out to be announcer Jeremy Borash and former ally Rockstar Spud. Both Borash and Spud lost their hair to ECIII, but they both gained loads of respect for standing up to TNA's biggest bully.

SHINE TITLE CHANGES

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Singles	Santana Garrett	Mia Yim	04.03.15
Tag Team	Cherry Bomb & Kimber Lee	Brandi Wine & Malia Hosaka	03.06.15 ¹
Tag Team	Jayne Jameson & Marti Belle ²	—	12.11.15
Singles	Taylor Made	Santana Garrett	12.11.15

¹Title vacated on October 2, 2015, due to injury to Cherry Bomb

²Beat Leva Bates & Mia Yim in a tournament final to fill the vacant title

WHY DOES HE
BOTHER WITH
THE BOW AND
ARROW WHEN
HE HAS GUNS
LIKE THOSE?

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



Stephen Amell, star of The CW's *Arrow*, looked impressive in his wrestling debut at SummerSlam, where he and Neville upset Stardust and Wade Barrett. If Stardust wants to continue instigating feuds with celebrities, perhaps he should lower the bar a bit ... might we suggest Ed O'Neill from *Modern Family*, perhaps?

≡TNA TITLE CHANGES≡

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
X Division	Austin Aries	Low-Ki	01.07.15
Heavyweight	Bobby Lashley	Bobby Roode	01.07.15
X Division	Low-Ki	Austin Aries	01.08.15
Tag Team	Davey Richards & Eddie Edwards	Abyss & James Storm	01.30.15
X Division	Rockstar Spud	Low-Ki	01.31.15
Heavyweight	Kurt Angle	Bobby Lashley	01.31.15
X Division	Kenny King	Rockstar Spud	03.15.15 ¹
Tag Team	Matt & Jeff Hardy	—	03.16.15 ²
X Division	Rockstar Spud	Kenny King	05.10.15 ³
X Division	Tigre Uno	—	06.24.15 ⁴
Knockouts	Brooke Tessmacher	Taryn Terrell	06.25.15
Tag Team	Davey Richards & Eddie Edwards	Austin Aries & Bobby Roode	06.25.15 ⁵
Heavyweight	Ethan Carter III	Kurt Angle	06.25.15
King of Mountain	Jeff Jarrett	—	06.28.15 ⁶
King of Mountain	PJ Black	—	07.27.15 ⁷
Tag Team	Brian Myers & Trevor Lee	Davey Richards & Eddie Edwards	07.28.15
Tag Team	Davey Richards & Eddie Edwards	Brian Myers & Trevor Lee	07.29.15
Knockouts	Gail Kim	Brooke Tessmacher	07.29.15
Heavyweight	Matt Hardy ⁹	Ethan Carter III	10.04.15 ⁸

¹Ultimate X match for the vacant title included Low-Ki & Kenny King, Ethan Carter III & Bram, & Austin Aries & Bobby Roode

²Ladder match included Tigre Uno & Mandrews

³Gauntlet match included Manik, DJ Z, Mandrews, Argos, Crazy Steve, & Tigre Uno

⁴Elimination match for the vacant title included Low-Ki & Grado

⁵Tournament final to fill the vacant title

⁶Match for the reactivated former TV title included Matt Hardy, Drew Galloway, Eric Young, & Bobby Roode

⁷Match for the vacant title included Bobby Lashley, Chris Mordetsky, Eric Young, & Robbie E

⁸Match included Drew Galloway

⁹Hardy vacated the title after Ethan Carter III threatened legal action

YEAR IN REVIEW

PHOTO BY XAVIER WOODS



KEEP YOUR (NEW) DAY JOB!

Publisher Stu Saks may not be up to George Napolitano's standard, but he's pretty handy with a camera. This horrible photo was taken with Stu's Nikon, but don't blame him. Saks was shooting The New Day vs. The Prime Time Players in Trenton, New Jersey, when Xavier Woods grabbed the camera (which was strapped to Stu's neck) and started snapping away without even looking through the viewfinder.

PHOTO BY STEVE ARGINTARU



CAUGHT IN THE CROSS-FIRE

Referee Jack Clemons is in the wrong place at the wrong time as Matt Cross wrestles Johnny Gargano for the vacant Smash Wrestling title. Fortunately, for Clemons (who is widely considered an excellent official), this mishap did not factor into the decision, which saw Gargano emerge as the winner of a locker room-emptying **brawl**.

WWE TITLE CHANGES

TITLE	WON BY	WON FROM	DATE
Intercontinental	Bad News Barrett	Dolph Ziggler	01.05.15
Tag Team	Tyson Kidd & Cesaro	Usos	02.22.15
Intercontinental	Daniel Bryan	Bad News Barrett	03.29.16 ¹
U.S.	John Cena	Rusev	03.29.15
World Heavyweight	Seth Rollins ³	Brock Lesnar	03.29.16 ²
Tag Team	New Day	Tyson Kidd & Cesaro	04.26.15
Intercontinental	Ryback	—	05.31.15 ⁴
Tag Team	Darren Young & Titus O'Neil	New Day	06.14.15
Tag Team	New Day	Darren Young & Titus O'Neil	08.23.15
U.S.	Seth Rollins	John Cena	08.23.15
Divas	Charlotte	Nikki Bella	09.20.15
U.S.	John Cena	Seth Rollins	09.20.15
Intercontinental	Kevin Owens	Ryback	09.20.15
U.S.	Alberto Del Rio	John Cena	10.25.15
World Heavyweight	Roman Reigns ⁵	—	11.22.15
World Heavyweight	Sheamus	Roman Reigns	11.22.15
Intercontinental	Dean Ambrose	Kevin Owens	12.13.15
World Heavyweight	Roman Reigns	Sheamus	12.14.15

¹Ladder match included Dean Ambrose, Dolph Ziggler, Luke Harper, R-Truth, & Stardust

²Match included Roman Reigns

³Relinquished title after suffering injury on November 4

⁴Elimination Chamber match for vacant title included Sheamus, Dolph Ziggler, Mark Henry, R-Truth, & King Barrett

⁵Beat Dean Ambrose in the final round of the WWE World title tournament

"Today's WWE Superstars ... are at a distinct disadvantage in some ways. They can't flip birds, and use the colorful language. They can't bleed—even when the situation seems ripe for it ... But all the blood, the language, and the violence paled in comparison to the real secret weapon of the Attitude Era: FREEDOM! The freedom to CREATE. The freedom to TRY. The freedom to FAIL ... There's a difference between playing to win and playing not to lose: One breeds confidence, the other breeds fear. It's the difference between cutting the type of promos 'Stone-Cold' Steve Austin and Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson gave, and the cookie-cutter approach all too often employed these days by WWE Creative. One style allowed for creativity and emotion. The other calls for memorization and recitation."

—Mick Foley, in a November 30 Facebook post he entitled "Final *Raw* For Foley?" speaking about his disenchantment with the current WWE product

"As long as you never give up, you can do it. I just think of all the years and all the 'no's' I heard—where I'd try to pitch Vince or get here, and be told no. It's crazy. Who ever would have thought that Nikki Bella would be number one in *PWI's* Top 50 Females? Who ever thought Nikki Bella would be tying—and passing—the record for longest-reigning Divas champion? ... To finally be where I always dreamed is such an amazing feeling. It feels like I've been training for the Olympics and have finally reached that gold medal."

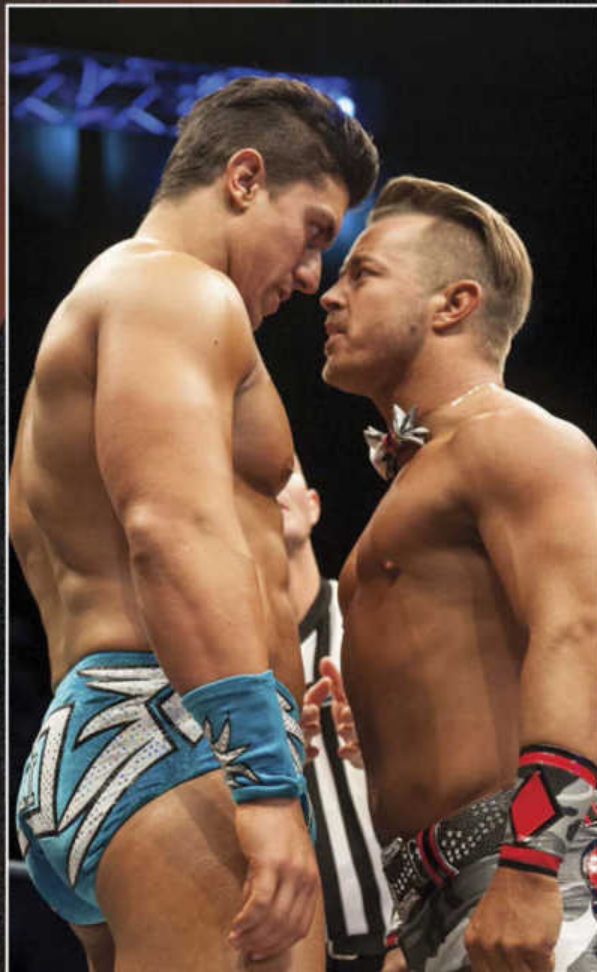
—Nikki Bella in an interview for *The PWI Podcast* on being named number one in the 2015 *PWI* "Female 50"

"Thank you, *PWI* magazine for ranking me #8 in the 'Female 50!!' I like to think it's moments like these that my dad is up in heaven smiling. I hope he's proud."

—Cherry Bomb, in a sweet and heartfelt message on Twitter

"If I could run anything, I would love to run developmental. I would love to put people in place and have the resources in place to create a TNA developmental system to create stars that are wholly identified with TNA."

—Billy Corgan in a media conference call discussing what he would like to achieve as the new senior producer of creative and talent development for TNA



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"ALL THAT YOU'RE USED TO DOING IS YOU'RE USED TO LAUGHING AT PEOPLE LIKE ME. ALL YOUR PHONY CAMPAIGNS. ALL YOUR LEGENDS THAT YOU BEAT. ALL YOUR PREACHING THAT YOU WANT TO BE THE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION. YOU ARE NOTHING BUT A SELF-ENTITLED PRICK."

—Rockstar Spud, finally standing up to Ethan Carter III and announcing he would cash in the X-division championship for a shot at Kurt Angle's TNA heavyweight title

THE YEAR IN QUOTES

"This is not who I am. I believe very strongly that every person in the world is important and should not be treated differently based on race, gender, orientation, religious beliefs, or otherwise. I am disappointed with myself that I used language that is offensive and inconsistent with my own beliefs."

—Hulk Hogan going into damage-control mode, issuing a public apology for racist comments he had been recorded making

"I don't think the way I look ever hindered me. Maybe that's why it took [WWE] 13 years to reach out. Maybe if I had been jacked and ripped, they would have reached out after six years. I don't know. But if I was ripped and tan and had a six-pack, I wouldn't be who I am. I think the appeal with me is that I'm different. And I'm proud to be different."

—NXT champion Kevin Owens in an interview with Senior Writer Al Castle conducted days before Owens debuted on **Raw**

"Effective immediately, *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* will recognize only one world title—the WWE World heavyweight championship."

—Publisher Stu Saks announcing that **PWI** would no longer recognize the TNA championship as a world title in the August 2015 edition of "From The Desk Of ..."

"I'm happy that people were concerned with my well-being. But it bothered me to see comments like, 'Poor girl!' and 'She should never have been in the ring in the first place.' I've worked hard to get where I am. I called Chris Dickinson out for the match because I wasn't about to let him run roughshod all over our roster. I asked for it to be no-DQ and I'm the one who landed the first chair shot."

—Kimber Lee, speaking to Contributing Writer Mike Bessler, defending her controversial hardcore intergender match against Chris Dickinson in *Beyond Wrestling*

"My black hat is tipped to all of you gentlemen and ladies that work at **PWI**. Stu's team. You guys did a great job."

—Jim Ross, commending *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* on its efforts to produce the 2015 "PWI 500" on the Ross Report podcast, featuring Senior Writer Dan Murphy

"That's right, my brothers! Because tonight, we're gonna get jiggy on these posers! Am I right?"

—Sheamus, making an awkwardly un-hip comment to *The New Day* at *Survivor Series*

"I, Bray Wyatt, and my family, have successfully harvested the souls of The Undertaker and Demon Kane, and that power—that power—is now surging through my veins. That power has become me, man. And it feels good. It feels really, really good."

—Bray Wyatt, summoning the thunder and lightning, after kidnapping *The Brothers of Destruction* and "stealing their souls"

"She wasn't a Diva. She wasn't a model. She was a wrestler. She scratched, she clawed, and she made it to the big show ... She is the mother of my child, The Glam-a-Mom, Beth Phoenix."

—Adam "Edge" Copeland, presenting the Women's Wrestling Award to Beth Phoenix at the 2015 Cauliflower Alley Club Reunion banquet

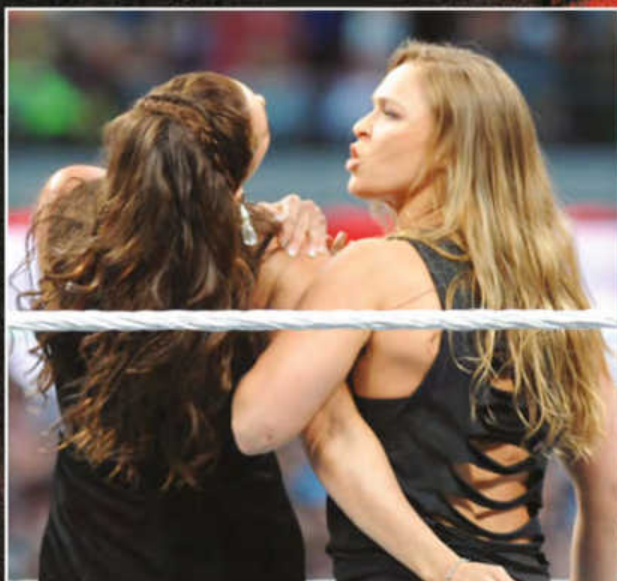


PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

"THE NATURE OF THE WWE IS TO BE COOL. TO BE IN IT IS TO BE EXTRA COOL."

—Ronda Rousey, sharing her thoughts on working with WWE to the *Las Vegas Review-Journal*

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO



THE TRUE START OF THE DIVAS REVOLUTION

Stephanie McMahon learned a painful lesson when she tried to intimidate UFC women's bantamweight champion Ronda Rousey at WrestleMania, earning an armbar for her efforts. Ronda's intensity and competitiveness must have rubbed off on Steph; just a few months later, Steph welcomed Charlotte, Sasha Banks, and Becky Lynch to the main roster. The revolution was on.

A HEATED HOTSEAT INTERVIEW



PHOTOS BY PAT LAPRADE

Veda Scott took issue with **PWI** Senior Writer Dan Murphy's line of questioning and gave him the cold shoulder. Then when Veda blew *her* top, Murphy turned the tables and gave her the cold shoulder. Whatever happened to diplomacy?

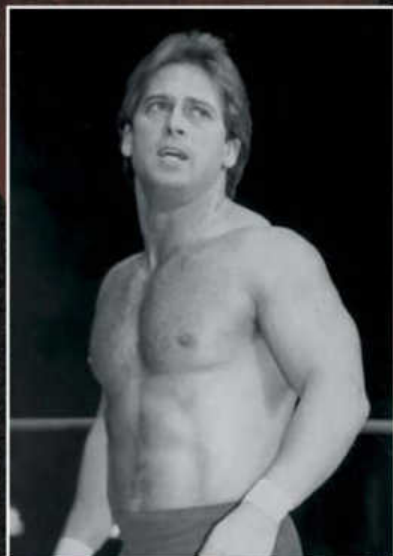
PHOTO BY GARY ROWELL



MY BLOODY VALENTINE

The infamous dog-collar match between Roddy Piper and Greg Valentine took place at the first Starrcade in 1983, but "The Hammer" was willing to take a bloody trip down memory lane in August. Valentine faced Phil "Nitro" Monahan in a dog collar match as a tribute to Piper, who passed away on July 31.

IN MEMORIAM



Carl Abell
 Perro Aguayo Jr.
 Tim Arson
 Emily Arthur
 Barbara Baker
 James Berry
 Andy Blacksmith
 Nick Bockwinkel
 Sgt. Boss
 Bill Bowman
 Eric Caiden
 Tito Carreon
 Tony Charles
 Cincinnati Red
 Jimmy Clydesdale
 Billy Coleman
 Cora Combs
 Bobby Cunningham
 Greg Daves
 Marie Darnell
 Dave Darrow
 Johnny Deacon
 Dean Detton Jr.
 Axel Dieter
 Jim Dotson

Dotty Downs
 Don Fargo
 Joe Franciosi
 Percival A. Friend
 Verne Gagne
 Tommy Gilbert
 Herman Gust
 Ashura Hara
 Bob Harms
 Stan (Lisowski) Holek
 Fred Hornby
 Gary Hyatt
 Frank Iadevaia
 Markus Jiminez
 Charles Jines
 Mark Jonas
 Bobby Jones
 Joey Kidman
 George Kramer
 Gordon Kumali
 Jack Land
 Buddy Landell
 Billy Lane
 Phyllis Lee
 Lizmark

Jim Lynam
 Daisy Mae
 Richie Magnett
 The Great Malumba
 Gran Markus Jr.
 Elliot Maron
 Buddy Marlo
 Hector Picasso
 Martinez
 Carlos Maynez
 Ben Doon McDonald
 Hack Meyers
 Curly Moe
 Ali Muhammed
 Floyd "Duke" Myers
 Eric Newton
 Spike Norton
 Todd "Oly" Olsen
 Irma Osorno
 Tim Parker
 Mary Lee Pesek
 Roddy Piper
 Jerry Prater
 James Prentice
 Prodigy PTV

Robbie Rage
 Johnny Rayborn
 Rudy Reyna
 Dusty Rhodes
 Steve Rickard
 Rising Son
 Tim Roberts
 Tommy Rogers
 Shabba Shabazz
 Paul Singh
 Tara the Southern Belle
 Dan Strikes
 Peter Szakacs
 Richard Szczypinski
 Johnny Thunder
 Jesse Tupak
 Rudy Valentino
 Eduardo Varillas
 El Verdugo
 Victor Vicious
 Buddy Ward
 Larry Winters
 Dennis J. Wright
 Ron Wright

All Brawn, No Brains Tag Team Of The Year: J. Diesel & Donovan Dijak

—Irvin Deitz
Highspire, PA

A Lot More Entertaining Than The Spirit Squad: New Day

—David Larrick
Ambridge, PA

Andre The Giant Memorial Fastest Title Reign: Matt Hardy & Roman Reigns

—Jimmy Nance
Asheboro, NC

Another year, another WWE Hall of Fame Snub: Rick Rude

—Lou Sica Jr.
Nottingham, MD

Back To The Future Award: 10-year WWE veteran Zack Ryder tries to break out of developmental

—Ryan Tourgee
Cranston, RI

Bad Things Do Come In Threes: Dusty Rhodes, Cora Combs, and Buddy Landell dying within a week of each other

—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

Best Butt: Santana Garrett

—David Dunaway
Rome, GA

Best On-Screen Character Since Mr. McMahon: Dario Cueto

—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

Best Promo Ever Award: Paul Heyman, *Raw*, August 24

—Anthony Pope
Newport News, VA

Best Promotion That Nobody Knew Was On TV: Paragon Pro Wrestling

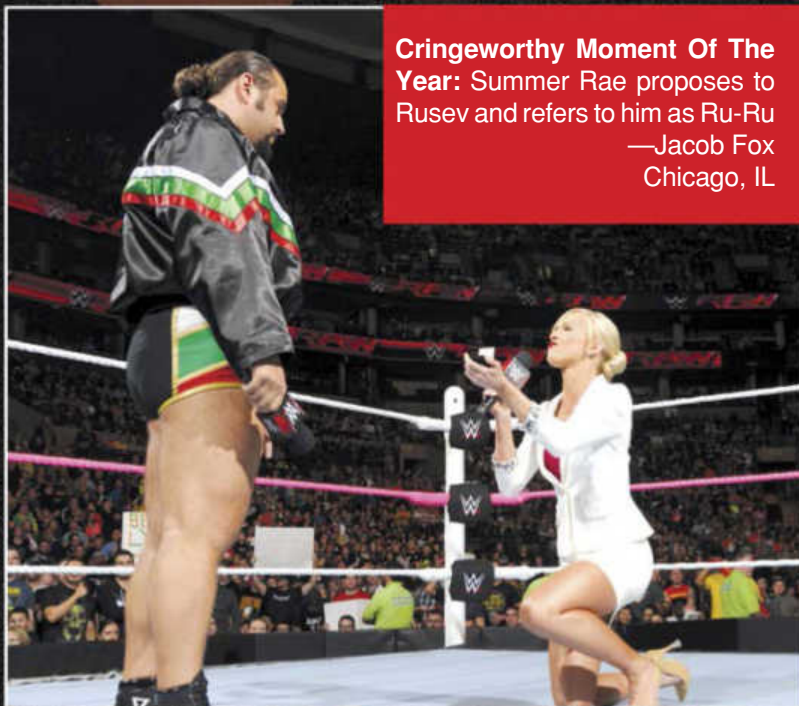
—David Larrick
Ambridge, PA

Could 260 Pounds Fit Through The Pearly Gates? Absolutely!: RIP, Dusty Rhodes

—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

Cringeworthy Moment Of The Year: Summer Rae proposes to Rusev and refers to him as Ru-Ru

—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL



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Best Trilogy: Tie: Kevin Owens vs. John Cena; Jay Lethal vs. Roderick Strong

Richard Edward Key
Petersburg, VA

Bob Hope “Thanks For The Memories” Award: Traci Brooks retires after 15-year career

—Sean Conner
Bronx, NY

Brought Dignity Back To The U.S. Title: John Cena

—Richard Edward Key
Petersburg, VA

Can Someone Please Put Her In A Straight Jacket: Paige

—Irvin Deitz
Highspire, PA

Dance Craze Of The Year: The Shera dance

—Roger Renman
Vantaa, Finland

Didn’t Put A Ring On It And Still Got To Keep It Award: John Cena & Nikki Bella

—Debbie Schmidling
Leavenworth, KS

Divalicious Calendar Model: Paige

—Curtis Pollanen
Moosonee, ON

Doesn’t Make Sense Award: ROH never having TV title matches on TV

—Mark Breckles
Deer Park, NY

UNOFFICIAL/OFFICIAL AWARDS

Does Vince McMahon Think WCW Is Still In Business?:

Sting 0-2 in WWE matches
—David Larrick
Ambridge, PA

Exotic Adrian Street Thinks He Should Tone It Down A Bit:

Dalton Castle
—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

Forget Badstreet USA Award:

Suplex City, bitch!
—Richard Edward Key
Petersburg, VA

Giving Lilian Garcia A Run For Her Money:

Melissa Santos
—Chad Simplicio
La Puente, CA

Hare Today, Gone Tomorrow:

The Bunny
—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

Hell Froze Over, Again:

Jeff Jarrett appears on *Impact Wrestling*
—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

He Looks Like He Is Auditioning For Michael Jackson's *Thriller* Video:

Shinsuke Nakamura
—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL

He Will Never Appear In Bill O'Reilly's "No Spin Zone":

Cesaro
—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

Human Jar Of Mayonnaise:

Sheamus & Paige
—Freddie Amatruda
Ardmore, PA

I Do Better On The Outside

Looking In: AJ Styles
—Richard Edward Key
Petersburg, VA

If "Despicable" Had A Name:

Kevin Owens
—Nicholas Garrett
Chicago, IL

If Not A WWE Hall Of Famer In 2016, Something's Wrong:

Victoria
—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

I Got Bruises Just Watching This Match Award:

Suzuki vs. Sakuraba at Wrestle Kingdom 9
—Patrick Reagan
Arlington, VA

It's A New Annoyance Every Time They Talk!:

The New Day
—Irvin Deitz
Highspire, PA

I Waited 30 Years For This?:

Sting goes 0-2 in WWE
—Ryan Tourgee
Cranston, RI

Letdown of the Year, Twice In A Row:

Daniel Bryan's injury
—Scott Awtrey
Dallas, TX

Lex Luger 2015:

Roman Reigns
—Justin Ballard
Boston, MA

Lucha Traitor Of The Year:

Alberto Del Rio
—Jeffrey Ramos
Bronx, NY

Modern-Day Bonnie & Clyde:

Stephanie McMahon & Triple-H
—Steven McLamb
Salem, NC

Most Obnoxious Prop Since Jimmy Hart's Megaphone:

Xavier Woods' trombone
—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

Move Of The Year:

Kevin Owens' popup power bomb
—Jim Blaire
Franklin, PA

Mr. Straight To DVD:

The Miz
—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

Never, Ever, Call Me Bullwinkle:

Moose
—Richard Edward Key
Petersburg, VA

COURTESY EL REY NETWORK



No One Has Ridden On Their Daddy's Coattails So Much Since Erik Watts Won 1992 Rookie Of The Year: Charlotte

—Lou Sica Jr.
Nottingham, MD

Not Exactly What President Woodrow Wilson Had In Mind: The League of Nations

—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

Oh, Crap! Creative Forgot We Were Here Again Award:

Zack Ryder, Adam Rose, Bo Dallas, Alex Riley, Curtis Axel, Damien Sandow, David Otunga, Emma, Heath Slater, and Jack Swagger

—Debbie Schmidling
Leavenworth, KS

Paula Abdul One Step Forward Two Steps Back Award: Cesaro

—Ryan Tourgee
Cranston, RI

PPV Of The Year (And Of The Decade): WrestleMania 31

—Justin Ballard
Boston, MA

Reading Your Book Briefly Pacified My Withdrawals From Not Watching You Wrestle On A Weekly Basis Award: Daniel Bryan

—Matthew R. Rooy
Ionia, MI

Red Rooster, Version 2.0: Sheamus

—Marco Blier
Riviere-du-Loup, QC

She Shoplifted My Heart: Emma
—Ryan Tourgee
Cranston, RI

So Much Build For Such A Weak Payoff: The Miz vs. Damien Mizdow

—Nicholas Garrett
Chicago, IL

Stupid Is As Stupid Looks: Sheamus

—Scott Stetzler
Lenhartsville, PA

Superkick Party, Every Week!: The Young Bucks joining ROH

—Chad Simplicio
La Puente, CA

Terry Funk "Retirement" Award: 67-year-old Great Kabuki working WrestleMania 31 Rumble

—Sean Conner
Bronx, NY

"Thanks A Lot, Hulk. You Ruined My Gimmick": Curtis Axel

—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

The "Barry Horowitz Called; He Wants His Win/Loss Record Back" Award: Bray Wyatt

—Michael S. McClead
Montgomery, IL

The Best Wrestling America Is Not Watching: New Japan Pro Wrestling

—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL

The Get A Room Award: Rusev & Lana

—Steven McLamb
Salem, NC

OMG, I'm Marking Out Moment Of The Year:

The Shield temporarily "reunites," power bombing Orton through the announcer's desk during the Fatal 4-Way main event of the May 17 WWE Payback

—Scott Look
Deland, FL

Resurrection Of The Year: The Brothers of Destruction

—Jim Blaire
Franklin, PA

Separated At Birth: Braun Strowman & Ogre From *Revenge Of The Nerds*

—Scott Stetzler
Lenhartsville, PA



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UNOFFICIAL/OFFICIAL AWARDS

The It's WAY WAY WAY WAY WAYWAYWAYWAYWAY Too Late Award:

Jeff Jarrett finally getting inducted in the TNA Hall of Fame

—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL

The Marathon Man:

Chris Hero
—Marco Blier
Riviere-du-Loup, QC

The Revolution Will Be Televised And Screwed Up:

Becky Lynch, Charlotte, and Sasha Banks finally debut on *Raw*, but only to be placed into cliques and misused

—Dave Whitaker
Danville, GA

The Smoking Hot Fiery Red Head Award:

Eva Marie
—Anthony Pope
Newport News, VA

The Stylin', Profilin', Limousine Riding, Jet Flying, Kiss-Stealing, Cartwheelin' Daughter Of The Man:

Charlotte
—Debbie Schmidling
Leavenworth, KS

The "What The Hell" Award:

John Cena actually becomes the most interesting thing on *Raw* during the U.S. Open Challenge

—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL

The Wrestling's Future Is Looking Bright Award:

NXT, ROH, NJPW, WWE, TNA, NWA, AJPW, Lucha Underground, AAA, and more wrestling than you can shake a kendo stick at!

—Jacob Fox
Chicago, IL



Thirty Years Ago He Would Have Been A Jobber:

Kevin Owens
—David Larrick
Ambridge, PA

Underrated WrestleMania Moment:

Randy Orton's reversal of the Curb Stomp into an RKO

—Zach Kiser
Apollo Beach, FL

Vince McMahon Grapefruits Award:

Paige mentions Reid Flair in a promo

—Jimmy Nance
Asheboro, NC

We Shall Overcomb! Or God Bless You Bruiser Brody:

If Donald Trump is in the WWE Hall of Fame, should we really feel so hurt that Frank Goodish isn't?

—Elia Barbat
Bound Brook, NJ

White Snake's "Here We Go Again" Award:

The rumors of TNA's demise following its departure from Destination America

—Matt Turcoliberi
Mentor, OH

Who Does He Think He Is? Baby Doll?:

"The Perfect 10" Tye Dillinger

—Anthony Miletic
Fort Lee, NJ

Why Is This Man Not Running A Wrestling Promotion?:

Jim Cornette
—Jimmy Nance
Asheboro, NC

Workout Routine Of The Year:

Bullfit
—Roger Renman
Vantaa, Finland

WrestleMania 32 Dream Match:

The Rock & Ronda Rousey vs. Triple-H & Holly Holm

—Tony Smail
Lake Hiawatha, NJ

WWE Needs Him Back:

Shane McMahon
—Jim Blaire
Franklin, PA

Yes People; Nice Girls DO Kick Ass:

Bayley
—Terry Drakes
Etobicoke, ON

You'll Get Better Inspirational Advice From Lucy Of The Peanuts Gang:

Bo Dallas
—Terry Drakes
Etobicoke, ON

TOP STORIES OF 2015

PASSING OF LEGENDS

Premature deaths—caused by drug use or violence—have marred previous years, but 2015 felt different: Great performers who touched our hearts for generations were suddenly called home, and, in one case, a future legend died inside the ring itself.

Former AWA World champion Verne Gagne died at his daughter's home in Bloomington, Minnesota, on April 27 at age 89. At the University of Minnesota, Gagne excelled in football and especially wrestling, winning four Big Ten championships and two NCAA championships. He quickly won the Chicago-based NWA U.S. title in the pro wrestling ranks, becoming a national television star

on the Dumont Network in the 1950s.

Gagne returned to Minnesota, where he and Wally Karbo founded the American Wrestling Association, which would be a vital part of the industry for the next three decades. Gagne reigned as AWA champ on 10 occasions over a 21-year period, including a historic run from 1968 to 1975. He also trained some of the sport's all-time greats, including Ric Flair, Bob Backlund, Rick Steamboat, Ken Patera, and The Iron Sheik.

Nick Bockwinkel, Gagne's arch-rival, died on November 14 in Las Vegas, from heart issues complicated by dementia. Trained by father Warren Bockwinkel and former NWA champ Lou Thesz, Bockwinkel was a handsome fan favorite early in his career, competing primarily on the West Coast with occasional stints in Hawaii, Georgia, and Florida. Bockwinkel didn't win his first AWA World championship until age 40, ending Gagne's record-breaking seven-year title reign in 1975.

Managed by Bobby Heenan, Bockwinkel enjoyed a total of three reigns in the 1980s. Despite his rulebreaking approach to defending his title, Bockwinkel was known as a classy and articulate champion, earning the distinction of the "most intelligent wrestler alive."

Bockwinkel served as WCW commissioner in the 1990s and president of the Cauliflower Alley Club from 2007 to 2014.

Dusty Rhodes passed away on June 11 at age 69 at a hospital in Orlando, Florida, one day after falling

at his home. The son of a plumber, Rhodes raised hell with partner Dick Murdoch as The Texas Outlaws early in his career before becoming the "American Dream" and an international attraction.

Rhodes reigned as NWA World champion three times between 1979 and 1986, and was a groundbreaking booker in Florida, Jim Crockett Promotions, and WCW. One of the best talkers in wrestling history, Rhodes set new standards for intensity and storytelling. Rhodes passed along his knowledge while working behind the scenes for WWE, most notably with aspiring stars in NXT.

"Rowdy" Roddy Piper, another star who used a mix of bravado and vulnerability to connect with fans, died of a heart attack—caused by a blood clot in his lung—on July 31 at age 61 in Hollywood, California. Piper enjoyed a successful career in various territories, particularly the Pacific Northwest and Mid-Atlantic, before entering the WWF in 1983. He became the top villain of the "Rock 'n' Wrestling" era and a key figure in the first three WrestleManias. He preceded Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson as the most famous wrestler to enjoy mainstream fame as an actor, most notably in John Carpenter's *They Live* in 1988.

Perro Aguayo Jr. died in a freak in-ring accident during a March 20 event in Tijuana, Mexico, as he teamed with Manik against Rey Mysterio Jr. and Black Tiger. Mysterio dropkicked Aguayo throat-first into the ropes, breaking his C-1, C-2, and C-3 vertebrae. Konnan attempted to revive Aguayo at ringside, but the second-generation star was pronounced dead at a nearby hospital. He was only 35.



Dusty Rhodes takes down
Nick Bockwinkel in 1978

TOP STORIES OF 2015

WRESTLEMANIA CONTINUES TO BREAK RECORDS

As it did 30 years earlier, the 2015 installment of WrestleMania continued the tradition of making history, breaking records, and dropping jaws.

Some 77,000 fans packed the brand new Levi's Stadium in Santa Clara, California, to witness WrestleMania 31 on March 29. Although the billed main event pitted WWE champ Brock Lesnar against Royal Rumble winner Roman Reigns, the "Showcase Of The Immortals" somehow ended with Seth Rollins wearing the World heavyweight championship belt.

Rollins, who lost a grudge match against Randy Orton earlier in the night, returned in the main event to cash in his Money in the Bank guaranteed world title shot, effectively transforming the bout into a triple-threat. After Reigns speared Lesnar, Rollins delivered his signature Curb Stomp to an exhausted Reigns to get the pin in one of the most shocking WrestleMania moments in recent memory.

"It almost went by too fast. I tried

desperately, as the fireworks were going off behind me, and the crowd was losing their minds, to soak it all in. But it was so much," Rollins recalled in an interview with *PWI* in July. "It's really hard to feel like you're in that moment: That Shawn Michaels moment. That Hulk Hogan moment. That Steve Austin or Rock moment. It's hard to put yourself in that place, with those type of people."

Elsewhere on the card, The Undertaker returned to the ring after a one-year layoff to pick up his 22nd WrestleMania win, beating Bray Wyatt; in his first ever WWE outing, Sting was defeated by Triple-H in a wild match that included interference from the NWO and D-Generation X; John Cena picked up the U.S. championship by dealing Rusev his first pinfall loss; Daniel Bryan won a seven-man ladder match for Wade Barrett's Intercontinental championship; AJ Lee and Paige beat The Bella Twins; Tyson Kidd & Cesaro retained the tag team championship in a four-team match; and Big Show won the second annual Andre the

Giant Memorial Battle Royal.

WWE boasted WrestleMania 31 being the most-watched, Mania ever, with more than 1.3 million alone viewing the show on the WWE Network. The 76,976 fans in attendance were the most ever for the venue, and the fifth-most for a WrestleMania. The event's \$12.6-million live gate also set a record.

As usual, a key part of the WrestleMania weekend experience was the annual WWE Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony the night before the big show. The inductees in the Class of 2015 were the late Randy "Macho Man" Savage, Kevin Nash, The Bushwhackers, celebrity WWE fan Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rikishi, Alundra Blayze, Larry Zbyszko, and Tatsumi Fujinami.

Savage's posthumous induction, which followed a prolonged falling-out between Savage and WWE, was considered particularly overdue. "Life's too short to hold a grudge. It's time for us to heal," Lanny Poffo said while accepting the award on his brother's behalf.



Brock Lesnar battles Roman Reigns in front of 76,976 fans at Levi's Stadium

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

TOP STORIES OF 2015

SETH ROLLINS' INCRECIBLE YEAR

He had been The Authority's "chosen one" since turning against his Shield teammates back in 2014, and it seemed only a matter of time before the talented star represented WWE as the World heavyweight champion. That came to pass at WrestleMania 31, where he cashed in his "Money In The Bank" briefcase near the end of the Brock Lesnar-Roman Reigns main event, dropping Reigns with a Curb Stomp to earn the three-count and the championship.

Rollins proved to be a dominant champion over the next seven months, not so much due to his own ability, but support from benefactors Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon, as well as constant interference from his personal security team, Jamie Noble and Joey Mercury. With considerable assistance, Rollins rose to the occasion at every major WWE event, retaining the title against Randy Orton in a steel cage at Extreme Rules; Orton, Roman Reigns, and Dean Ambrose in a four-way match at Payback; Ambrose at Elimination Chamber and again in a ladder match at Money in the Bank; Brock Lesnar at Battleground (with The Undertaker's help); and Kane at Hell in a Cell. He even captured John Cena's U.S. championship in a title-vs.-title bout at SummerSlam. He was the first man to hold the WWE World title concurrently with a secondary championship since Triple-H

held both the World and Intercontinental titles in 2002.

Although Rollins dropped the U.S. belt back to Cena at September's Night of Champions, he went on to successfully defend the World title against Sting in the main event, defeating the injured icon in less than 15 minutes.

Everything was going his way, with The Authority celebrating his many successes in the lead-up to Survivor Series. Because Rollins had supposedly defeated all of his competition, Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon devised a mini-tournament to determine the top contender to his championship, a spot won by Roman Reigns.

Tragedy struck Rollins on November 4, however, during a World title defense against Kane in Dublin, Ireland. Rollins tried to take over Kane with a sunset flip off the top rope, which the challenger resisted, prompting the champion to land on his feet. Rollins' left knee buckled awkwardly. Incredibly, Rollins managed to power-bomb Kane off the top rope and through a table, deliver some chair shots, and execute the Pedigree for the victory.

The WWE champ suffered extensive injuries to his knee, including a torn ACL, a torn MCL, and a torn medial meniscus. Total damage: Rollins would be sidelined for six to nine

months and forced to vacate the World title. The Authority announced an ongoing 16-man tournament for *Raw* and *Smackdown*, with the two finalists competing for the gold at Survivor Series.

Despite Rollins' cheating ways, he earned some respect during his reign. He was a far more active champion than Brock Lesnar and was a reliable fixture on *Raw*, often holding court with long monologues during opening segments of the program. He was trusted with that key position due to his ability to effectively advance storylines on the microphone. Rollins was selected number one in the "PWI 500" and was voted Wrestler of the Year by *PWI* readers. It was widely believed that he would comfortably coast into the main event of WrestleMania 32. Right now, it's uncertain whether Rollins will even return before WrestleMania.

Sting, who suffered a potentially career-ending injury against Rollins at Night of Champions, told *wwe.com*, "He's got to be the best I've ever worked with ... I've never seen somebody as talented."

By November, Rollins would have nothing to show for his career year



THE RISE OF NXT

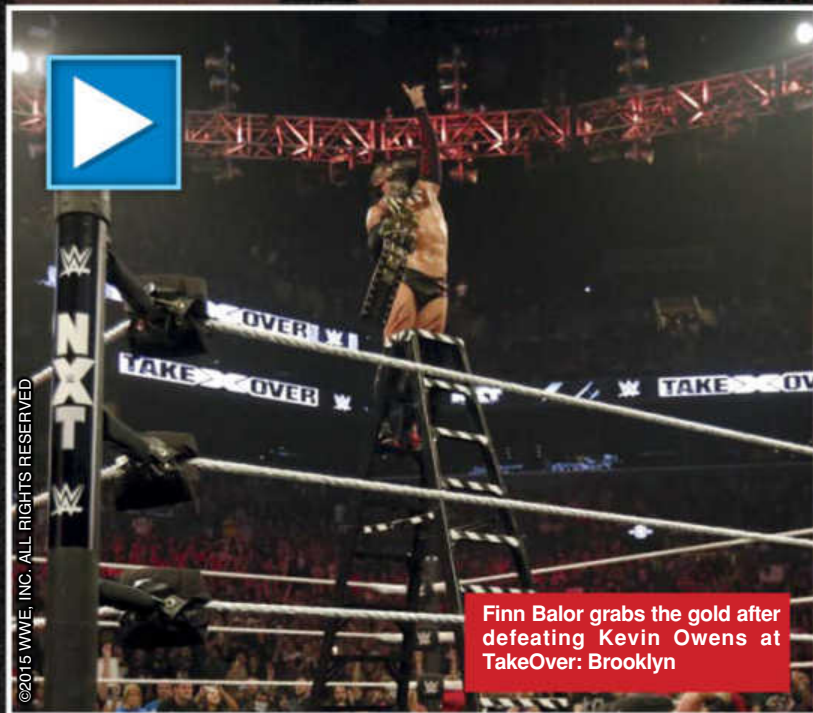
For much of the past year, WWE's hottest brand was, arguably, the one watched by the fewest fans.

NXT exploded in 2015, with fans, critics, and insiders alike praising WWE's longtime developmental system for presenting pro wrestling better than any promotion in the U.S.

Although fans enjoyed NXT's blend of high-octane athleticism and stripped-down wrestling storytelling each week on its usual Wednesday night slot on the WWE Network, it was at the NXT's semi-regular TakeOver network specials that WWE's young lions really got the chance to shine.

Early in the year, all eyes were on the latest chapter in the storied rivalry between Sami Zayn and Kevin Owens. The two former partners twice headlined TakeOver events in NXT championship matches. So impressive were Zayn and Owens that both men were called up to WWE's main stage, where they took on U.S. champion John Cena in their debut matches. Zayn came up short in his challenge, and ended up injured in the process. But Owens, who was the reigning NXT champion at the time, beat Cena in his first match—sparking a series of matches praised as some of the best of 2015.

Other NXT stars also made a big impact. Former NJPW standout Finn Balor brought his hypnotic entrance and thrilling wrestling style to WWE's developmental brand, culminating in the former Prince Devitt defeating Owens for the NXT title at a July 4 WWE Network special from Balor's home away from home, Tokyo, Japan.



Finn Balor grabs the gold after defeating Kevin Owens at TakeOver: Brooklyn

Several weeks later, the two men once again did battle in the main event of NXT's most successful event to date—a televised special in front of 15,000 rabid fans in the sold-out Barclays Center in Brooklyn, the night before SummerSlam. The event—heralded by many fans and critics as being better than SummerSlam itself—was widely considered a major turning point for NXT. No longer was NXT simply WWE's minor leagues.

"I wanted to create sort of a counter-brand—another brand in WWE that we create the future in, and try to make it as big as possible," said WWE Executive Vice President Paul "Triple-H" Levesque, who was largely credited with forming NXT out of his vision for the sport. "Every time I feel like we've reached a platform where maybe it's as big as it's going to get, we seem to grow

even further."

During 2015, NXT began running live events before big crowds all over the U.S. But despite its success, NXT continued to find new ways to break from WWE's traditional presentation of pro wrestling. Its October TakeOver special was headlined by a women's match; former TNA stars Samoa Joe and James Storm were both brought in and featured prominently; NXT hosted the first Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic tournament, won by Joe and Balor; and the brand developed a working relationship with independent wrestling promoter Gabe Sapolsky that saw NXT feature many indy stars.

In December, NXT was set to take its red-hot product overseas for its first-ever tour of the United Kingdom.

TOP STORIES OF 2015

TNA'S TURBULENT YEAR

While critics have been predicting TNA's demise for nearly a decade-and-a-half, those looming death gongs seemed more like a countdown clock in 2015. Drastic cost-cutting measures, including the departures of major stars, and an uncertain television future made TNA's survivability a major topic.

After *Impact Wrestling* lost its cable home on Spike in 2014, TNA President Dixie Carter negotiated a deal for its flagship program to begin appearing on Destination America in January 2015. It seemed like a step backward, considering Destination America was a struggling entity and available in fewer house-

holds than Spike. Yet Carter spun the positive: TNA would find a more eager partner in DA because the channel really needed the ratings that pro wrestling could provide. In a strange way, TNA could be right at home with barbecue cookoffs, Sasquatch sightings, and all things Alaska. By June, Destination America was touting how much *Impact Wrestling* had helped improve its prime-time ratings.

But there were warning signs. TNA's new *Unlocked* series was removed from the Saturday morning lineup in just a few weeks. Continuous repeats of *Impact* episodes on Friday nights were reduced to only two airings. Then the show was moved to Wednesdays.

In the midst of this turmoil, Carter asked Smashing Pumpkins lead singer Billy Corgan—former owner of Chicago-based indy Resistance Pro Wrestling and a lifelong fan—to join TNA as senior producer of creative and talent development. Corgan hoped to assist TNA in two key areas: talent development and social media.

Then the shocker: Destination America chose to cancel TNA programming by the end of 2015, a decision made less than six months after TNA joined the network. Some defended TNA, suggesting

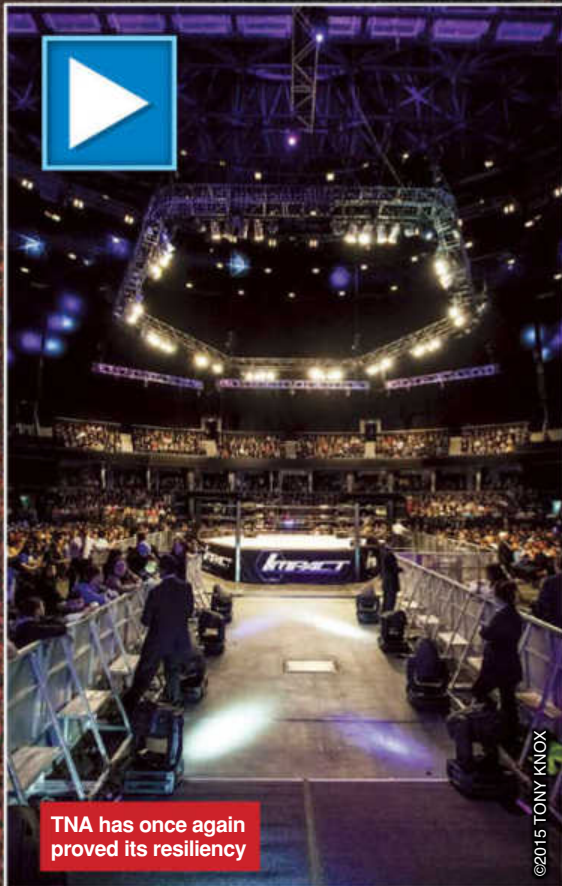
it was a victim of wrestling stigma and that Destination America hadn't given it a chance.

Yet that didn't explain the sudden appearance of *Ring Of Honor Wrestling* on the network, airing at 8 p.m. and 11 p.m. Eastern, book-ending *Impact Wrestling* on Wednesday nights. Had Destination America decided to boot TNA because it made a better deal with Ring of Honor? Was Carter aware of the ROH deal in advance? Did she deliberately keep that a secret from her talent and employees?

Whichever was the case, ROH's premiere on Destination America was devastating for TNA locker-room morale. And the departures of high-profile stars Samoa Joe, James Storm, and MVP didn't help matters.

By the fall, TNA storylines were dramatically affected by the return of founder Jeff Jarrett, who had departed from the company in late-2012. In addition to being inducted into the TNA Hall of Fame, Jarrett led a contingent from his new company, Global Force Wrestling, in an invasion that culminated with Team TNA defeating Team GFW on the September 16 edition of *Impact*. According to sources, Jarrett agreed to the short-lived angle in return for getting exposure for GFW and selling his minority stake in TNA to the Carter family.

But as the year closed, there was some good news. In November, it was announced that TNA had made a deal with Pop (a joint venture of CBS and Lions Gate Entertainment) to air *Impact* on Tuesday nights at 9 p.m. beginning in 2016. Pop reaches 64.7 percent of U.S. households, compared to 49.2 for Destination America.



TNA has once again proved its resiliency

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WWE'S HIGH EARNINGS AND LOW RATINGS

Alarm bells went off at WWE Headquarters—and even more so on social media—when Nielsen revealed that the September 28 edition of *Monday Night Raw* had dropped to a 2.3, the show's lowest non-holiday figure in 18 years. Fans blamed Creative, suggesting Roman Reigns didn't draw, Bray Wyatt was overexposed, and Sting and Kane (both of whom had been featured in prominent storylines) were past their prime.

Yet the slide continued, with *Raw*'s average rating dropping to

2.1 on October 19 despite featuring proven stars such as The Undertaker, Shawn Michaels, and Ric Flair. Steve Austin, who many felt could make a difference, was relegated to merely introducing Undertaker. The feeling was that Austin's involvement should be minimal if he weren't going to be used in a major angle. Nevertheless, it was deflating that WWE's biggest names from the past were unable to boost the rating.

Low ratings always lead to creative soul-searching. But were *Raw*'s declining numbers the most accurate measure of success?

Ratings were the ultimate gauge of viewer interest during the Monday Night War, when cable-TV was the lifeblood of pro wrestling, but it became increasingly apparent in 2015 that *Raw*'s Nielsen ratings could tell only part of the story.

While *Raw*'s actual numbers were falling, the program's standings among other shows remained respectable, with each of *Raw*'s three hours occupying spots in cable's top 10 ratings every Monday night. Only red-hot shows such as ESPN's *Monday Night Football* and *SportsCenter* routinely beat *Raw* during the final quarter of the year, for example. DVRs and opposing programming on the WWE Network also contributed to a drop in *Raw*'s real-time numbers.

In reality, more people were consuming WWE content than ever in

2015. And there were more platforms than *Raw* on USA. There were repeats on Universal HD and NBC Universo and Hulu Plus, in addition to recaps on YouTube and *Smackdown* on Thursday nights.

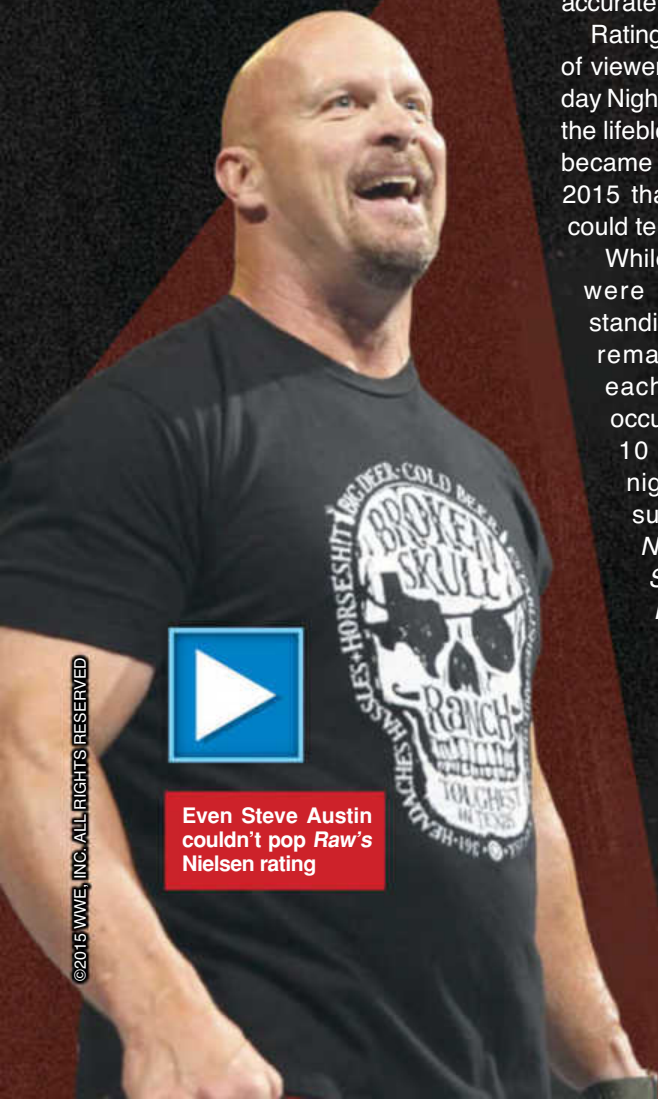
The truth was this: WWE made lots of money this year despite *Raw*'s ebbing numbers.

WWE was successful in three key areas: the WWE Network, WrestleMania, and licensing. And what a relief for the McMahons, who saw the WWE Network reach the breakeven point for profitability in January. Last year, Wall Street analysts predicted the WWE Network would cannibalize WrestleMania's revenue. That did not happen in great measure.

The company generated its highest quarterly revenue in history between January and March, earning \$176.2-million. While traditional pay-per-view buys for WrestleMania continued to plummet, down to 259,000, WWE Network subscriptions and traditional WrestleMania PPV buys combined to earn \$37.6-million, compared to \$43.2-million in 2014. It was a decrease, but far from the hysterical Wall Street projections.

Increased television rights fees and lucrative videogame licensing also drove WWE profits. And, with overall exposure important to generating revenue, WWE surpassed 500 million social media followers across all of its global platforms, ranking number six on Sprinklr's Social Business Index, ahead of the NBA and NFL.

And here's the final proof of WWE's incredible success in 2015: The company's market value was estimated at \$1.38-billion.



Even Steve Austin
couldn't pop *Raw*'s
Nielsen rating

TOP STORIES OF 2015

WRESTLE KINGDOM 9 OPENS NEW WORLDS FOR NJPW

New Japan Pro Wrestling's annual Tokyo Dome super show reached new heights, and new fans, in 2015.

The January 4 Wrestle Kingdom 9 event appeared to be a major turning point in NJPW's efforts to bring its world-class athleticism and showmanship to wrestling fans across the globe. With Jeff Jarrett's Global Force Wrestling as its official American promoter, the event was offered on pay-per-view in the U.S. for the first time.

In a major coup, NJPW hired legendary wrestling announcer Jim Ross to do the play-by-play on the American broadcast, accompanied

by Matt Stryker.

"It did really well," Ross told *The Rack* wrestling radio show in January. "It's been critically acclaimed as one of the better pay-per-view wrestling shows in years and it was really neat to be able to be part of that."

Fans in the U.S. and Japan, including some 36,000 inside the Tokyo Dome, witnessed several thrilling performances, including international sensation Shinsuke Nakamura's successful Intercontinental title defense against Kota Ibushi and AJ Styles defeating Tetsuya Naito.

The main event featured the latest

chapter in the legendary rivalry between two of NJPW's biggest stars of the past decade, as seven-time IWGP champion Hiroshi Tanahashi defended his title against Kazuchika Okada. After 31 minutes of dramatic, back-and-forth action, Tanahashi put the "Rainmaker" away with his High Fly Flow top rope splash.

The experiment of making the event available to American fans appeared to be a major success. Demand on the Flipsps app, which was just one way to watch the show in the U.S., was so high that it caused the service to crash.

"It was just a phenomenal show," Jarrett told Wrestling Inc.'s Raj Giri. "It was so good live. I was not only wrestling, but working, and making sure I had my promoter hat on and making sure anything that needs to get done gets done. When you really let it soak in as a fan, it blew me away."

NJPW made other strides in trying to capture American fans in 2015. In January, cable network AXS TV began airing NJPW events on Friday nights, with former UFC heavyweight champ Josh Barnett and MMA and boxing announcer Mauro Ranallo providing commentary.

New Japan talent also made several visits to U.S. soil as part of the company's working relationship with Ring of Honor. In the main event of ROH's Field of Honor event on August 22 in Brooklyn, New York, Nakamura and ROH heavyweight champ Jay Lethal teamed up to take on reDRagon in front of 2,000 live fans.

U.S. wrestling fans craving even more NJPW action were also able to subscribe to New Japan World—the company's streaming video service.

**Kazuchika Okada
delivers big against
Hiroshi Tanahashi**



TOP STORIES OF 2015

DIVAS REVOLUTION GAINS TRACTION

If two women ever go on to headline a WrestleMania, 2015 may be remembered as the year that got them to that point.

After years of presenting its “Divas” as little more than eye candy in short matches, WWE launched what it called a “Divas Revolution” in 2015. The newfound attention to WWE’s female performers, which coincided with a broader national discussion on women’s equality, started early in the year with a simple hashtag that gained steam on social media: #givedivasachance.

WWE Chief Brand Officer Stephanie McMahon vowed the company would do just that. But it wasn’t on *Raw* or *Smackdown* that WWE’s women began breaking out, but rather on WWE’s developmental brand, NXT. Ladies like Natalya, Charlotte, and Sasha Banks began turning heads and stealing shows with dramatic, athletic, and intense matches that rivaled those being put on by their male counterparts.

A major turning point came when Banks defended her NXT Women’s title against Bayley in the co-main event of an NXT event airing live on the WWE Network from the sold-out Barclays Center in Brooklyn, New York, the night before SummerSlam. In a match heralded by many as the greatest women’s match ever contested on American soil, Bayley defeated Banks to capture the championship.

The women would top themselves just six weeks later when they headlined another NXT TakeOver special in a thrilling

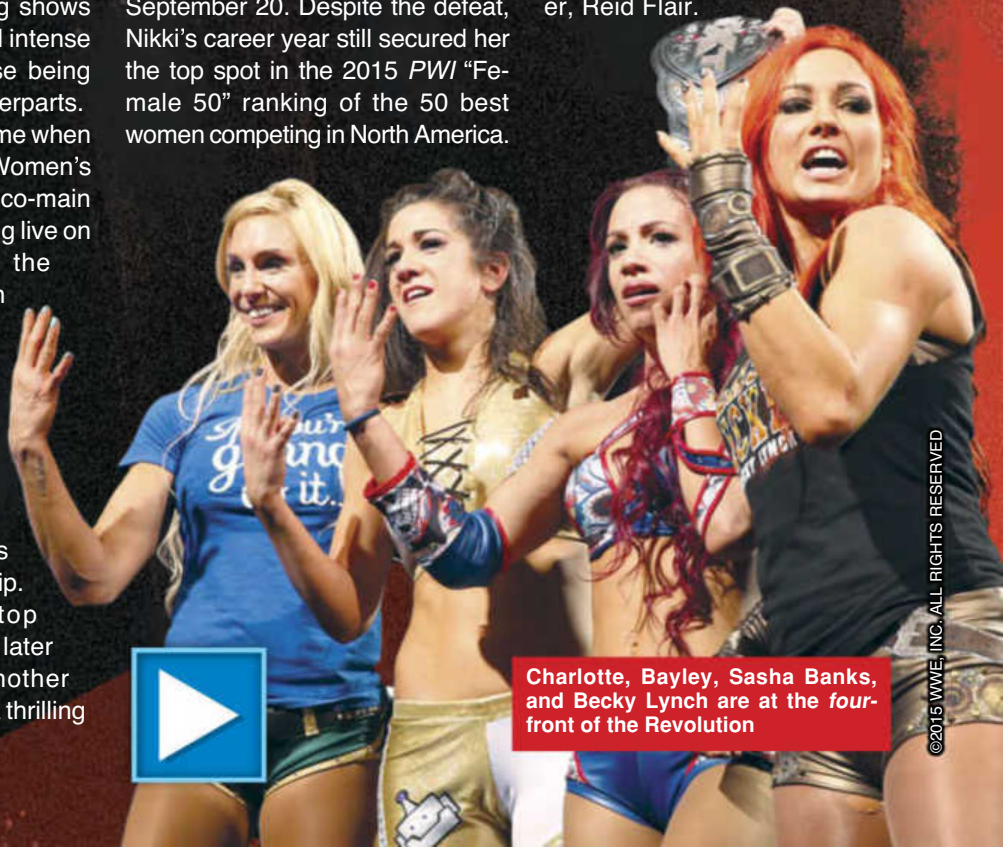
30-minute ironman match, again won by Bayley. This marked the first time a women’s match was ever voted Match of the Year by *PWI* readers.

Meanwhile, the “revolution” had made its way to WWE’s main brands as well. NXT’s Banks, Charlotte, and Becky Lynch all debuted on *Raw* on July 13 and in the following weeks were featured in a storyline that saw three factions of women battle it out for female supremacy on WWE’s main stage.

But it wasn’t only the women of NXT that made their mark in 2015. Veteran WWE starlet Nikki Bella eclipsed AJ Lee’s 295-day reign as Divas champion and set a new record at 301 days. The historic reign, which included victories against Paige, Naomi, and Tamina, finally came to an end at the hands of Charlotte at Night of Champions on September 20. Despite the defeat, Nikki’s career year still secured her the top spot in the 2015 *PWI* “Female 50” ranking of the 50 best women competing in North America.

“When I came into this industry over eight years ago, I was simply looked at as arm candy and it was like, ‘Oh, don’t worry. You don’t have to learn to wrestle that good’ and I was like, ‘No, that’s the reason why I’m here—because I want to be a wrestler,’” Nikki told *PWI*. “I don’t want to just be a Diva that’s on some guy’s arm or valeting them down to the ring ...’ I wanted to be a female wrestler.”

The increased attention given to WWE’s women also came with increased scrutiny. When a contract signing between Charlotte and Paige for their title match at Survivor series was featured in the final segment of a November *Raw*, much of the talk coming out of the angle had to do with WWE’s controversial decision to have Paige reference the 2013 drug overdose death of Charlotte’s younger brother, Reid Flair.



Charlotte, Bayley, Sasha Banks, and Becky Lynch are at the forefront of the Revolution



TOP STORIES OF 2015

HULK HOGAN & JIMMY SNUKA'S FALL FROM GRACE

Before “Hulkamania” there was the “Superfly,” who brought breathtaking excitement to the WWF with his exotic persona and death-defying leaps. But Jimmy Snuka’s career began to unravel only months prior to the invasion of “Hulkamania”—largely due to circumstances haunting him to this day.

Indeed, the names Hogan and Snuka are still often mentioned in the same sentence—but not because of their heroic exploits 30 years ago. In 2015, the two men were mired in scandal and shame.

Hogan’s reputation was dealt a blow in 2012 when Gawker posted an unauthorized sex video from 2006 involving “The Hulkster” and Heather Clem, the ex-wife of Bubba the Love Sponge. The appropriateness of Gawker posting such a video became the main issue. Fresh off his split from longtime wife Linda, Hogan claimed his “head was in a bad place” at that time.

For a while, Hogan was winning the media battle. He filed a \$100-million privacy lawsuit against Gawker and maintained his legends contract with WWE.

Public opinion changed in July when *The National Enquirer* and Radar Online revealed that Hogan had used racial slurs during that same video—including the n-word—when commenting on the social life of his daughter, Brooke Hogan. He continued to use the same slur repeatedly in different contexts.

Days after that audio

was made public, Bay 9 News in Tampa released his jailhouse conversations with son Nick Hogan in 2008. Nick had been speeding in his sports car, resulting in an auto accident and leaving his friend brain-damaged in a long-term nursing facility. Hulk used the n-word repeatedly when talking about the racial breakdown of various detention centers.

This time, WWE immediately cut ties with its former megastar. And while Hogan would remain a household name, his stature as a role model would be forever tarnished.

And then there was Snuka. For three decades, “Superfly” was hounded by allegations that he had killed his then-girlfriend in a motel in Whitehall

Township, Pennsylvania, back in 1983. In 2015, due to advances in DNA evidence, Lehigh County prosecutors charged Snuka with third-degree murder in the death of Nancy Argentino.

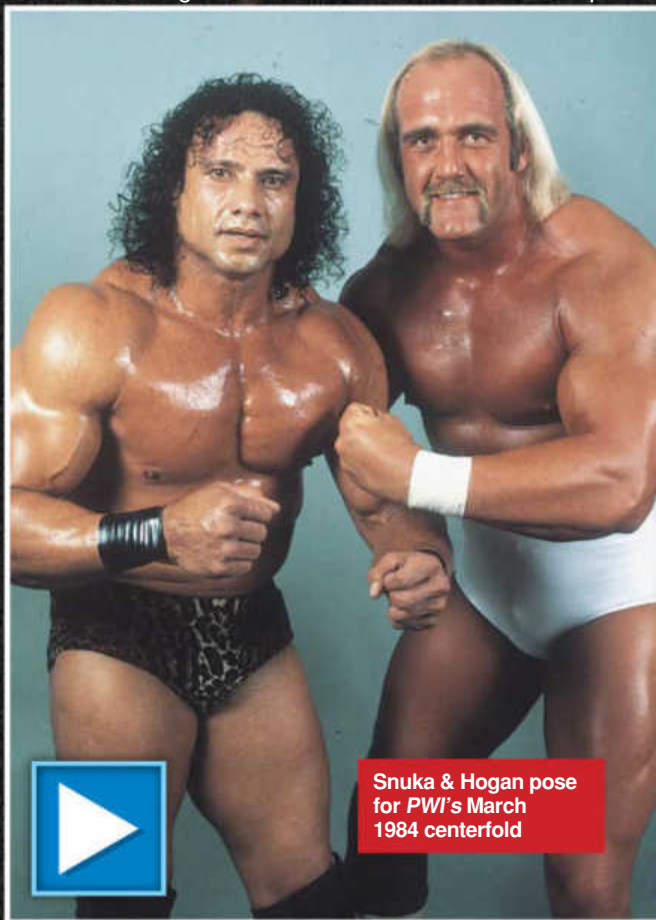
Snuka claimed they had parked on the side of the road following WWF TV tapings in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and that Argentino had slipped and hit her head; they later checked into a motel and she did not awaken after taking a nap.

Police found her unresponsive with more than 30 bruises and a skull fracture. Despite the severity of the injuries, and the fact that Snuka had already been charged with second- and third-degree assault of Argentino in upstate New York four months

earlier, prosecutors opted not to bring charges.

“Best we can see, there was an argument between them,” Lehigh County District Attorney Jim Martin said in a press conference. Snuka’s attorney, Robert Kirwan, waived his client’s right to a preliminary hearing in exchange for seeing grand jury testimony—which included 20 witnesses—before the actual trial. Kirwan insisted that Snuka, who was about to undergo chemotherapy for stomach cancer, was eager for the proceedings to begin as soon as possible.

“It’s not a day he’s dreading,” said Kirwan. “It’s a day of freedom for him to prove he’s an innocent man.”



Snuka & Hogan pose for PWI's March 1984 centerfold

BROCK LESNAR CHOOSES WWE OVER UFC

Early in 2015, the most sought-after prize in wrestling was not a championship belt. It was the services of one man or, rather, one beast.

Heading into WrestleMania 31 on March 29, there was considerable uncertainty surrounding the future of WWE's top box office attraction, and then-reigning World champion Brock Lesnar. After returning to WWE in 2012 following an eight-year absence from the company, Lesnar flirted with the idea of returning to UFC.

After winning the UFC heavy-weight championship in just his fourth mixed martial arts fight, Lesnar dropped the title in 2010, and retired a year later while battling the effects of diverticulitis. Now healthy and still under 40, Lesnar began training for his return to the octagon early in 2015.

Lesnar's questionable future in wrestling raised several pressing questions about WWE's future, especially as Lesnar's WrestleMania opponent, Roman Reigns, struggled to connect with fans in the way a future WWE champion needed to do.

Just five days before WrestleMania, Lesnar appeared live on ESPN's *SportsCenter* to reveal his plans in a sit-down interview with Michelle Beadle.

"I'm officially closing the door on MMA," Lesnar said. "I re-signed [with WWE] last night. We came to a conclusion last night. The offer on the table, I just could not refuse."

Lesnar explained that while he seriously considered a return to UFC, ultimately the lifestyle provided by WWE better suited him as a husband and father.

"It was a hard decision to make," he said. "I've thought about this for a

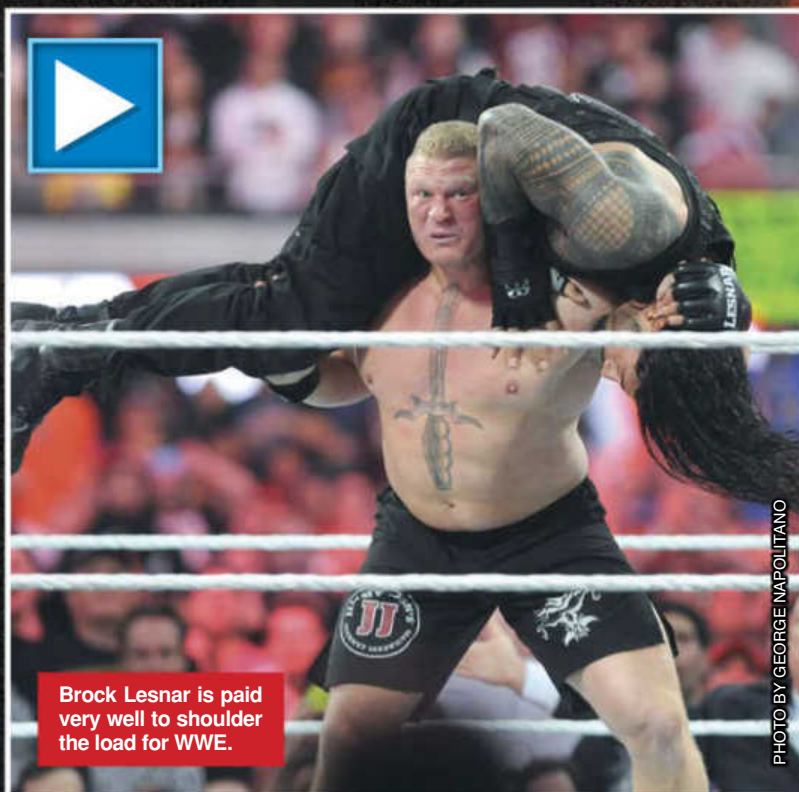
year. At the end of the day, it's all about me wanting to have fun. The last 2½ months I've been training to get back into the Octagon. I felt physically great, but something lacked mentally—and that's not good."

For his part, UFC President Dana White said he wished his former cash cow well. "I'm happy for him," White told Fox Sports. "From what I understand, Vince made him an offer he couldn't refuse."

Although Lesnar lost the title at WrestleMania—to Seth Rollins—his re-upping with WWE made the "Beast Incarnate" far more visible to wrestling fans than in recent years. Lesnar would go on to compete a total of eight times in 2015, including in matches against Kofi Kingston, Rollins, and The Big Show.

Lesnar extended his historic WrestleMania 30 rivalry with The Undertaker into a trilogy of thrilling matches that *PWI* readers would vote Feud of the Year. He lost to 'Taker at SummerSlam in a controversial match that saw The Undertaker tap out to a Lesnar armlock outside the view of the referee. 'Taker later hit Lesnar with a low blow and choked him unconscious for the victory. Lesnar came back to win the rubber match at Hell in a Cell two months later.

In addition to his matches, Lesnar made various other television appearances for WWE throughout 2015, including in a rare, candid interview with Steve Austin on a WWE Network special. His association with WWE was believed to be a major factor in ESPN's decision to run a weekly WWE interview segment.



Brock Lesnar is paid very well to shoulder the load for WWE.

PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

STU SAKS [PUBLISHER]

When Daniel Bryan laid down the Intercontinental title belt in the middle of the ring at the U.S. Bank Arena in Cincinnati on May 11, I never thought that would be my top memory for the year. I assumed this was just another unfortunate setback for Bryan, who also had to give up the WWE World title a year earlier because of a nerve injury in his neck. Short of divine intervention, we have to get used to the idea that we may never see Daniel Bryan in the ring again. Oh, he wants to come back ... badly. He feels he is

over the effects of the concussion that sidelined him. He even has clearance from his own doctor. But WWE's doctor, renowned neurosurgeon Joseph Maroon, will not sign off on his return. As sad as I am for Bryan, I commend WWE for backing Maroon's findings, especially at a time when they could desperately use this athlete's unique services.



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DAN MURPHY [SENIOR WRITER]

Seeing Jushin Liger in a WWE ring at NXT: TakeOver in August was a wonderfully surreal moment. I was fascinated by Liger when he showed up in WCW and helped redefine cruiserweight wrestling in the early-1990s. I always wondered how he would be received if he ventured to WWE. Would the fans reject him because he didn't speak English and wore a strange mask? Would WWE matchmakers position him as a low-card novelty? I yearned to see someone of his talent in WWE, but feared the charisma, aerial artistry, and magic that endeared him to me wouldn't translate to the modern WWE climate. Thankfully, I was wrong. Liger was treated—and received—as the legend that he is. He added another chapter to

his incredible legacy and finally received a chance to shine under the bright lights of WWE. It was a wonderful sight to see.



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HARRY BURKETT [SENIOR WRITER]

Under the tutelage of an anonymous guru, Pentagon Jr. insulted and attacked Vampiro in his apparent quest to lure him from the announce table and into the ring. He finally got his wish at Ultima Lucha. Ian Hodgkinson, who had endeared himself to modern-day fans with his blunt yet amiable demeanor as a color commentator on *Lucha Underground*, entered the ring as full-blown Vampiro Canadiense, complete with white death makeup, a pontiff's hat, and other pseudo-Catholic regalia. He unleashed a sick barrage against Pentagon Jr., highly disturbing younger Temple "believers" who thought they knew him. Older fans, though, already knew of his many atrocities in wrestling capitals around the world. In

the end, Pentagon Jr. snapped the 47-year-old's arm in half. Yet Vampiro smiled, proud that his protege had passed his latest test, for the demented Vampiro Canadiense had been his master.



PHOTO COURTESY EL REY NETWORK

AL CASTLE [SENIOR WRITER]

If nothing else was accomplished in wrestling in 2015, I hope it was the year that the "You can't wrestle!" chants directed at John Cena were retired once and for all. At 38 years of age, and in his 16th year in the sport, Cena outworked most everybody on the WWE roster. From his sensational triple-threat match with Brock Lesnar and Seth Rollins at the Royal Rumble, to his star-making outings with Kevin Owens, to wrestling Seth Rollins with a broken nose, to going 40 minutes with Cesaro on *Raw*, Cena put forth one memorable performance after another in 2015. That one of the biggest wrestling stars in WWE's history would be satisfied competing over the U.S. title says a lot about Cena's humility. That he put forth the best performances of his career while doing so says even more about his work ethic. John Cena "can't wrestle"? Find me someone in WWE that can wrestle better.



PHOTO BY STU SAKS

STAFF MEMORIES

MIKE BESSLER [CONTRIBUTING WRITER]

I have always considered it a badge of honor that I cheered on Randy Savage in Poffo's ICW long before the rest of the world came to know him. Later on, I loved seeing Savage reach dizzying heights of fame in the WWF, but after his jump to WCW, it looked like he would never reconcile with WWE. In 2011, I saw Lanny Poffo induct his late brother into the hall of fame of a small indy company and couldn't help thinking it was the only way I would ever see Randy's memory appropriately honored. When WWE finally welcomed Randy into its Hall of Fame in 2015, it was a watershed moment. Of course, the odd decision to include Hulk Hogan in the induction, as well as the cringeworthy misspelling of Lanny's last name during the Wrestle-

Mania HOF segment, served as a reminder to fans that at the end of the day, the WWE's Hall of Fame is still Vince McMahon's endeavor, part and parcel.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

BRADY HICKS [CONTRIBUTING WRITER]

Nothing hit me harder in 2015 than the day that Hulk Hogan was banished from WWE, possibly forever. I was one of millions of Hulkamaniacs in the 1980s and 1990s. I said my prayers, took my vitamins, and generally tried to do the right things. Like so many other *PWI* writers, I probably wouldn't even be part of all this had it not been for the red and yellow capturing my imagination to the extent that it did. I think that's why, selfishly, "The Hulkster's" firing hurts so much. I don't want to question WWE's motives or even whether the proverbial "punishment fits the crime." We need to continue to focus on acceptance

and tolerance for all, and WWE, as a publicly traded company, did what it felt it needed to do. My only hope is that time brings healing and perspective for Hogan, his peers, and all those who were affected by his insensitive words at a terrible time in his life.



PHOTO BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

KEVIN MCELVANEY [CONTRIBUTING WRITER]

It's been said before but bears repeating: This was a breakthrough year for women's wrestling. And, of course, much of the credit goes to NXT's talented and hardworking female roster. Of all the memorable matches those women wrestled this year, Sasha Banks vs. Bayley at TakeOver: Brooklyn had to be the highlight. So many months of drama and tension coalesced in a highly technical, emotionally satisfying contest. From the over-the-top entrances to that unforgettable finish, all the stars seemed to have aligned. The sellout crowd at the Barclays Center was hooked, and I was fortunate enough to be among them. Those moments, when we find ourselves on the edges of our seats, completely lost in the action—wincing in empathy when one wrestler is down, or screaming for her opponent to just tap out already—are what being a wrestling fan is all about.



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LOUIE DEE [CONTRIBUTING WRITER]

The 2015 moment I'll remember most fondly was one of closure 14 years in the making: Sting vs. Triple-H at WrestleMania 31. On March 26, 2001, Sting won the last-ever WCW match, but for 14 years after the company waved the white flag in the Monday Night War, Steve Borden was the only major war-time WCW star to never compete in WWE. So seeing him standing toe-to-toe against the heir to the McMahon kingdom was the perfect blend of nostalgia and progress—the last remaining "inter-promotional dream match" come to life. The match, like the War itself, ended with Triple-H and WWE victorious, but the key moment came when the COO shook Sting's hand afterward. That gesture between two veteran generals buried the hatchet between WWE and WCW once and for all, and finally turned the page on one of the greatest chapters of wrestling's history book.



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May 2001: The WrestleMania Curse! Will The Great One Ever Win The Big One? Plus: Vince McMahon, William Regal, Page & Nash, Ivory, Lance Storm, ECW.

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June 2002: 2002 Insiders' Poll: 50 Red-Hot Questions Answered! Plus: NWO, Steve Austin, Ric Flair.

Sum. 2003 (Special Edition): WWE at 40! (Digital only; visit pwi-online.com—Cover History)

Sept. 2003: Guardian Angle: The One Superstar WWE Couldn't Afford To Lose. Plus: The Hurricane, Sting, Kazarian-Sabin, Jeff Jarrett, Booker T.

Jan. 2004: All Fired Up! Can Kane Blaze A Trail To The Raw Title? Plus: John Cena, Samoa Joe, Flair-Goldberg, Christian, ugliest wrestlers.

Oct. 2004: Eugene, The Impossible Dream: When Will His Opponents Wake Up? Plus: Victoria, Edge, Dudleys, AJ Styles, six-sided ring.

Fall 2004: Women Of Wrestling. 164 pages of wrestling's hottest stars. (Digital format only.)

Feb. 2005: A Yes Man? No Way! Ric Flair's Secret Plan Will Ruin Triple-H! Plus: Y2J, The Naturals, Luther Reigns, WrestleMania 21 countdown.

March 2005: 2004—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2004 In Review, Achievement '05 awards, Unofficial/Official, phantastic photos of 2004, predictions for 2005.

June 2005: Our Challenge To John Cena: Dominate 2005 ... Or We Don't Want To See You! Plus: Steve Austin, Austin Aries, Big Show, AMW.

July 2005: Gold Strike! Cena & Batista Change The Face Of Wrestling! Plus: Kevin Nash, Chris Benoit, Heartbreakers, all-time WrestleMania roster, the state of the game.

Aug. 2005: Kurt Angle: The 10 Reasons He's The Best Ever. Plus: Edge, Alex Shelley, Christy Hemme, DDP, WWE Hall of Fame.

Fall 2005 (164-Page Special): Wrestling Yearbook. Insider scouting reports on 50 top stars.

Oct. 2005: Whole Lita Love: How Many Men Can One Woman Ruin? Plus: John Cena, CM

Dec. 2005: Triple-H: Which "H" Fits? Hated? Hero? Hypocrite? Plus: Guerrero-Mysterio, Dixie Carter.

Jan. 2006: Special Report—WWE vs. TNA: Let The War Begin! Plus: Dudleys vs. Hardy & Rhino, Orton-Orton, Bryan Danielson, report cards.

Feb. 2006: Losing Street Cred? The Time Is Now For Cena To Get Tough. Plus: Jerry Lawler, Eddie Guerrero, Austin-Hogan.

July 2006: WM 22: Magic Mania Moments! Plus: The State of the Game, Abyss & Mitchell, Davey Richards, Christian Cage.

Aug. 2006: Exclusive! Edge Comes Out Swinging! Plus: Brother Runt, Benoit & Lashley, Milano Collection AT.

Sept. 2006: The Triple-H Paradox: What He Needs He Cannot Keep. Plus: Mid-year report, Shawn Michaels, Rob Van Dam, Chris Daniels, SummerSlam's top 25 matches, ECW years—1992-2001.

Oct. 2006 (164-Page Special): Report Cards Of The Stars. *PWI* grades the sport's top 50 stars.

Dec. 2006: The Angry Young Man! CM Punk Leads The New ECW Revolution. Also: Triple-H, Christian, Batista.

Jan. 2007: Sudden Impact! Can Kurt Angle Do For TNA What Hulk Hogan Did For WCW? Plus: Raw vs. Smackdown vs. TNA vs. ECW, Big Show, Orton-Masters-Carlito-Nitro, Matches of the Year.

Feb. 2007: Hollywood Ending: Cena's Pumped For A Year Of Wrestling Only! Also: Randy Orton, Hardcore Holly, Booker-Batista, Kurt Angle.

March 2007: 2006—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2006 In Review, Achievement 2006 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2006, predictions for 2007.

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Dec. 2007: Triple-H Disses The Champ: "Cena's Disrespect Is A Sign Of Fear." Plus: Kurt & Karen Angle, McMahons-Hornswoggle, Batista-Khali, Raw vs. Smackdown vs. TNA vs. ECW, 90 minutes with Chris Jericho.

Jan. 2008 (164-Page Special): The Greats Of The Game. Relive the careers of: Triple-H, Kurt Angle, John Cena, Batista, Sting, Edge.

Feb. 2008: HBK: "If You Ask Me, I'm Younger Than Randy Orton." Plus: Kurt Angle, Nigel McGuinness, Gail Kim, Royal Rumble at 20, sleaziest sluts & slimeballs.

March 2008: 2007—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2007 In Review, Achievement 2007 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2007, predictions for 2008.

April 2008 (164-Page Special): Wrestling Annual. A month-by-month recap of 2007.

June 2008: Special Tribute To Ric Flair: His 25 Greatest Covers Of All-Time. Plus: Y2J-JBL, Christian Cage, NWA, Brock Lesnar, Vickie Guerrero, John Morrison.

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Jan. 2009 (164-Page Special): The Greats Of The Game. Relive the careers of: The Undertaker, Randy Orton, Booker T, Shawn Michaels, Samoa Joe, Rey Mysterio Jr.

Feb. 2009: Annoying? Si ... Successful? Si ... But Is Santino A Worthy Champ? Plus: Sheik Abdul Bashir, TNA Wars, Hardys, Super 8, Bryan Danielson, second-generations stars vs. dads, 20 matches that changed wrestling.

March 2009: 2008—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2008 In Review, Achievement 2008 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, phantastic photos of 2008, predictions for 2009.

April 2009 (164-Page Special): Wrestling Annual. A month-by-month recap of 2008.

June 2009: The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Hardy vs. Hardy, Christian, Team 3-D, Kelly Kelly, CZW, Shawn Michaels, greatest wrestlers never to win world title.

July 2009 (164-Page Special): Report Cards Of The Stars. *PWI* grades the sport's top 50 stars.

Aug. 2009: Jacked Up! Old Pro, New Era For TNA. Plus: Batista, FCW prospects, MVP, Homicide, State of the Game.

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Dec. 2009: Five-Way Faceoff: Raw vs. Smackdown vs. ECW vs. ROH. Plus: ODB-Cody, Orton-Cena, American Wolves, Dolph Ziggler, anti-Americanism, Gabe Sapolsky.

Jan. 2010 (164-Page Special): The Greats Of The Game: Relive the careers of: Chris Jericho, AJ Styles, CM Punk, Team 3-D, Big Show, Kevin Nash.

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Dec. 2010: Cena's Suicide Mission: There's No Winning And There's No Way Out! Plus: Danielson-Shingo, Kane-Undertaker, Hardcore Justice, Motor City Machine Guns, secondary titles, four-way faceoff.

Jan. 2011 (164-Page Special): The Greats Of The Game. Relive the careers of: Chris Jericho, AJ Styles, CM Punk, Team 3-D, Big Show, Kevin Nash.

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July 2011 (164-Page Special): Report Cards Of The Stars. *PWI* grades the sport's top 50 stars, plus Undertaker's career grades.

Aug. 2011: Rock vs. Cena: Can't "Bring It" Soon Enough! Plus: Sin Cara, Matt Morgan, WrestleMania 27, pay-per-view piracy, State of the Game.

Sept. 2011: Can Cena Stay On Top With Rock In His Head? Plus: Randy Savage, RVD-Hulk, Christian, Brie Bella, Super 8, Mid-Year Report.

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May 2012: Rock vs. Cena: Our 11-Page Report On The Match Of The Century. Plus: Austin Aries, R-Truth, TNA-OVW, WWE injuries, Report Cards.

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May 2013: Finally! The WWE Title Has Come Back To The Rock: What To Expect From 'Mania And Beyond. Plus: All-Time WrestleMania show-stealers, Kevin Steen, Bully Ray, report cards.

July 2013: Redemption, Thy Name Is Cena. Plus: WrestleMania 29 Winners & Losers, WWE Hall of Fame, Jesse Sorensen, Matt Taven, Devon, *PWI* Poll.

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July 2014: WrestleMania 30: The Real Winners & Losers. Plus: Ultimate Warrior, Adam Cole, Carter Family, Super 8, brothers, WWE HOF, *PWI* Poll.

Sept. 2014: Celebrate With Us As *PWI* Turns 35. Plus: AJ Styles, NXT, Eric Young, WWE vs. TNA vs. ROH. (Digital format only)

Dec. 2014: *PWI* 500. Ranking the top 500 stars in the sport.

Feb. 2015: Unstoppable: Why Brock Lesnar Will Remain Champ For As Long As He Likes. Plus: Cesaro, Jay Briscoe, Bobby Roode, Paige, the "PWI Female 50".

April 2015: 2014—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2014 In Review, Achievement 2014 awards, Unofficial/Official awards.

June 2015: Report Cards Of The Stars. Plus: Alberto el Patron, CM Punk, Bobby Lashley, Wrestle Kingdom 9, WrestleMania 1 vs. WrestleMania 31.

Aug. 2015: WrestleMania 31: The Real Winners & Losers. Plus: Johnny Mundo, Ethan Carter III, *PWI* Poll.

Oct. 2015: Exclusive Interview—Kevin Owens: "I'm Proud To Be Different." Plus: Dolph Ziggler, Drew Galloway, U.S. & I-C titles, ROH vs. New Japan, wrestling's rising stars.

Dec. 2015: *PWI* 500. Ranking the top 500 stars in the sport.

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INDEPENDENT ROUNDUP

BY MIKE BESSLER

SONJAY DUTT ENJOYED a banner weekend at this year's WrestleCade IV extravaganza in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. On November 27, Dutt pinned Global Force Wrestling Nex*Gen champ **P.J. Black** in a title bout, becoming the second man to hold that strap in the fledgling promotion's history. Black had won the title on October 23, defeating **T.J.P., Jigsaw,** and **Virgil Flynn** in a four-way.

Dutt's first defense came the following night, and he was impressive in pinning **Matt Sydal**. After the match, Dutt and Sydal hugged it out, expressing their mutual respect.

Things didn't go as swimmingly for **Matt Hardy** at WrestleCade, though. Not only did he lose the WrestleCade title in a fierce battle with **Jeff Jarrett**, the

elder Hardy also took a wicked guitar shot to the head from Double-J. As a result, WrestleCade—which prides itself as a purveyor of family-friendly entertainment—became a scene of copious bloodletting. The gory injury afforded Jarrett the final advantage needed for a three-count. As a consolation prize, Hardy left the venue with a grisly gash that required 38 stitches.

“I love my life,” tweeted **Sami Callihan** just two weeks after his abrupt departure from NXT. Much like his colleague **Chris Hero**, who was released from WWE after a stint in NXT back in 2013, the man formerly known as **Solo-mon Crowe** was welcomed back to the indies with all of the pomp

and circumstance one would expect at a homecoming for a conquering hero. In addition to the adulation of his longtime fans, Callihan already has some title gold to his name, along with a few new enemies.

Callihan reminded fans of his ferocity and unpredictability at AAW's Windy City Classic XI show when he ambushed **Eddie Kingston** after Kingston's hard-fought three-way victory over **Ethan Page** and **Trevor Lee** for the Chicago promotion's top strap. The following night, “The Death Machine” answered an open challenge by 2CW champion **Sean Carr**, picking up a quick win and Carr's title via submission.

“The Death Machine’ is back!” Callihan told the crowd as he celebrated his first post-WWE title win.



A guitar shot by Jeff Jarrett left Matt Hardy a bloody mess at WrestleCade IV in North Carolina. Thirty-eight stitches were required to seal the gash.

PHOTO BY JOSEY MORGAN/TRIPLE THREAT PHOTOGRAPHY

In early-November, the NWA welcomed Alabama-based Throwback Championship Wrestling to its expanding list of affiliated federations. The promotion airs a weekly television show entitled *Throwback TV* and its roster includes the likes of **Rob Conway**, **Devin Driscoll**, **"Nature Boy" Paul Lee**, and **"Tokyo Monster" Kahagas** ... At AIW's Hell on Earth show in Cleveland, Ohio, **Cheech** and **Colin Delaney** retained their tag title when they beat **Tyson Dux** and **"Hot Sauce" Tracy Williams**. The incumbent AIW champ was not as fortunate, as **Rickey Shane** dropped his strap to Ethan Page ... Fans of Maryland Championship Wrestling enjoyed a star-studded trip down memory lane at the promotion's November 14 Autumn Armageddon show. The event opened with **Ric Flair**, **Tully Blanchard**, **J.J. Dillon**, and **Baby Doll** regaling fans with tales of their glory days wrestling in the Baltimore area. Although her dad was on hand for the remainder of the show, **Tessa Blanchard** was unable to pull off a win, falling to **Renee Michelle**. Later in the evening, **King McBride** retained the

MCW title by defeating **Brandon Scott** ... Big man **JSin Sullivan** retained his DOA Pacific Northwest title after a grueling Three Stages of Hell match against **Wade Hess** and **Draven Vargas** on November 22 in Portland, Oregon. After the match, Sullivan's manager, **Don Chaco**, acknowledged that it was a tough night for Sullivan, chastising fans for enjoying the "blood and violence" that Sullivan had to endure in order to keep his strap ... CZW's "Cerebral" show in Dayton, Ohio, was the scene of a brutal title match between champion **"Bulldozer" Matt Tremont** and **DJ Hyde**. The men were unable to continue following a double-knockdown in which both tried to kayo one another with cinder blocks. They met for a rematch on November 21 in Voorhees, New Jersey, where the champion retained his title when Tremont sent Hyde through a barbed-wire covered board ... **Johnny Saovi** made his High Impact Wrestling debut at the promotion's November 21 show in Tucson, Arizona. Although he couldn't seal the deal by pinning **Chris Evans**, fans were quite impressed, saluting both men with a standing ovation after their 15-minute battle. The same night, **Chaos** and **Roman Alexander**—better

known to HIW faithful as **24/7**—won the vacant HIW tag title after taking out **MADA** and **Mac Havoc** ... **Aiden Wake** and **"Stonehenge" Joseph Wayne** won Minnesota Independent Wrestling's tag title at the promotion's December 5 show in Chanhassen. **J.D. Bandit** and **Scott Story** might have had a fighting chance had Story had not left Bandit to fend for himself in what quickly became a two-against-one handicap match. In the end, Wake and Wayne still had to resort to chicanery to put Bandit down, whacking him with a title belt while the ref was distracted ... **"Taskmaster" Kevin Sullivan** and **"Coach" Mike Jones** almost walked out of the November 21 Suquamish Championship Wrestling show in Suquamish, Washington, without their tag belts after some illegal shenanigans by challengers **Bruiser Joe** and **Dale Houston** cost them their match. Senior official **Jason Amos** couldn't overrule referee **Randy Payne's** decision, but he did re-start the match, giving Sullivan and Jones the chance to regain the title, which they did via a pair of quick school-boy rollups. For their part, Joe and Houston now enjoy the dubious distinction of having the shortest tag title run in SCW history.



Recently released by WWE, Sami Callihan salutes his Chicago fans at AAW's Windy City Classic XI after sneak-attacking Eddie Kingston and swiping his title belt. Two nights later in Watertown, New York, the former Solomon Crowe earned a title of his own, blitzing 2CW champ Sean Carr in a mere 36 seconds.

PHOTO BY ICHIBAN DRUNK

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

BY DAN MURPHY

THE TEAM OF **Togi Makabe** and **Tomoaki Honma** won the 2015 New Japan World Tag League tournament, defeating **Tetsuya Naito** and **EVIL** in the final round of the 14-day event on December 9. Honma scored the tourney-winning pinfall after connecting with a Kokeshi diving headbutt on EVIL at the 21:36 mark.

Following the match, Makabe and Honma made it clear that they have their eyes on the IWGP tag team title, currently held by **Doc Gallows** and **Karl Anderson** of **The Bullet Club**. Gallows and Anderson did score a win over Makabe and Honma during the tournament, but finished in third

place in Block B, preventing them from advancing to the finals.

Other notable teams competing in the 16-team tournament included the international dream team of **Michael Elgin** and **Hiroshi Tanahashi**, **The Addiction** (**Christopher Daniels** and **Frankie Kazarian**), **Hiroyoshi Tenzan** and **Satoshi Kojima**, and **The Kingdom** (**Michael Bennett** and **Matt Taven**).

AJ Styles, who had entered the tournament as **Yujiro Takahashi's** partner, was forced to pull out of the event after suffering a back injury as a precaution to ensure he could compete at **Wrestle Kingdom 10** in January.

Alberto Del Rio's surprise return to WWE at **Hell in a Cell** left Mexico's AAA promotion high and dry as Del Rio (billed there as **Alberto El Patron**) held the AAA Mega heavyweight title at the time of his departure. The company had no choice but to strip him of the championship.

AAA Executive Vice President of Business Development **Dorian Roldan Pena** appeared on "Sam Roberts' Wrestling Podcast" and said he learned that Del Rio was jumping ship just three days before the WWE PPV.

"You cannot compete with a company like WWE when you're talking about that amount of

Togi Makabe and Tomoaki Honma were the winners of the prestigious 2015 New Japan World Tag League tournament. Makabe and Honma won five of their seven matches, including their 21:36 pin over Tetsuya Naito and EVIL (Takaaki Watababe) in the finals.



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money,” Pena said. “We were closing his deal in Mexico and he was just finishing his deal in Lucha Underground, so the timing for him was perfect to do whatever he wants ... I think he [made] a smart decision.”

Pena’s diplomacy seems to indicate that he’s still keeping the door open for Del Rio to eventually return to AAA at some point in the future.

While on the topic of Del Rio, the U.S. champion was attacked by a fan during a match in Puerto Rico on December 5. Del Rio was granted permission to fulfill a contractually obligated date in Puerto Rico for a grudge match against **Ray Gonzalez** at the World Wrestling Council’s year-end Lockout event. Del Rio had previously attacked Gonzalez’ son (**El Hijo de Ray Gonzalez**), creating a tense environment for the grudge match.

While Del Rio was outside the ring, a fan grabbed hold of him, setting off a brief skirmish. Del Rio was able to return to the ring as security dealt with the unruly fan before the situation could further escalate. Gonzalez won the match by disqualification.

In other matches from Lockout, WWC junior heavyweight champion **Peter the Bad Romance** beat **Morgan, Ricochet**, and **Tommy Diablo** in a four-way; **El Hijo de Dos Caras** defeated **El Cuervo**; **Joe Bravo** defeated **Mike Mendoza**; Puerto Rican champion **Miguel Perez** defeated **Angel Fashion**; tag team champions **La Revolucion** beat **Thunder** and **Lightning**; **Chicano** and **Doris Cotto** defeated **La Reina Havana** and **Leon Apolo** in a mixed tag match; **Mighty Ursus** beat **Black Pain**; and WWC Universal champion **Mr. 450** defeated **Sensacional Carlitos**.

The ageless **Jun Akiyama** earned a shot at the All Japan Triple Crown title by winning the Odo Tournament in September,



Alberto Del Rio lifts the flag of Mexico at WWC's Lockout event in December. ADR's patriotism didn't go over well with the Puerto Rican crowd, especially one hooligan, who attacked the WWE U.S. champion when he crossed his path at ringside.

PHOTO BY ANTHONY PINEIRO DELGADO

and he wasted little time in turning that title shot into his second Triple Crown championship. The 46-year-old Akiyama defeated **Akebono** for the title on November 1 in Hirosaki, Japan.

All Japan was also forced to declare one of its titles vacant, as junior heavyweight champion **Kotaro Suzuki** left the company. The title was declared vacant on November 16. Suzuki had held the championship since March 27. All Japan was forced to declare the tag team title vacant in September when **Go Shiozaki** (who held the tag title with **Kento Miyahara**) resigned. The string of departures is troubling for a company that once was considered Japan’s premier wrestling promotion.

The **Rougeau** family (one of Quebec’s wrestling royal families

along with the **Vachons**) are the subject of a new documentary that debuted December 30 on RDS (Quebec’s version of ESPN). The film focuses on four generations of the wrestling Rougeau dynasty, their impact in their native Quebec, and their overall legacy in professional wrestling. The fact that the documentary is airing on the mainstream sports-themed RDS network speaks volumes about the high regard in which the Rougeaus are held in that province.

In other news out of Quebec, North Shore Pro Wrestling heavyweight champion **Marko Estrada** successfully defended his title against **Johnny Gargano**, on December 5 in Quebec City. The win over Gargano cements Estrada’s position as one of Canada’s top young stars. □

BETWEEN FALLS

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PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns.



FEMALE 50

Let's set the record straight: We know that Sasha Banks is a better wrestler than Nikki Bella. But it was Bella who held the WWE Divas title for 82 percent of the period we evaluated in determining the rankings of the top 50 women wrestlers competing in North America in the February 2016 issue. That's all there is to it. As controversial as the 2015 "Female 50" became on the Internet, the selection of Nikki Bella was a pretty easy call for us.

"Sasha Banks isn't just the best woman wrestler on the planet, she's the best wrestler, period," e-mailed Bryan Trager. "She wasn't on the ballot, but she got my vote for Wrestler of the Year."

"Hey, PWI, I wouldn't concern myself with all the Internet babble or being blocked by Sasha Banks on Twitter," wrote Beth Wohlford. "If you're a PWI reader, you understand that the 'Female 50,' like the 'PWI 500,' is not based on work rate. If it were, we may very well wind up with the same winner year after year. I love Sasha, but Bella was the proper call."

NXT EFFECT

I thought Al Castle's story "The NXT Effect" was fascinating. I commend Al on his even-handed approach. He noted that while WWE is picking off the best independent talent, wrestlers on the indy ranks are energized by the possibility that even if they are working in front of a few hundred people, one of those people might actually be there on behalf of WWE and have the power to change their lives.

WWE has received criticism for scheduling an NXT event in Brooklyn on the same night Ring of Honor was to hold one of its most important shows of the year just a few miles away. But, as the article points out, ROH scheduled its show for that Saturday in Brooklyn to take advantage of the opportunity created by WWE's SummerSlam weekend. Turnabout's fair play.

I am a huge fan of NXT, but I do have a concern that the luster will

wear off once WWE has finished poaching the best indy talent out there. For now, though, there are so many options for fans, and we're the true beneficiaries of this changing landscape.

AL MOYERS
Bethpage, NY

PWI JINX?

Nice of you guys to give some ink to Paragon Pro Wrestling being available on Pop TV ("The Business Page," February 2016). But before the magazine was even delivered to my door, TNA was in and Paragon was out.

In the same issue, you ran a story pointing out the number of consecutive weeks Jay Lethal had appeared in PWI's weekly online ratings ("Wrestling's Ironman: How Jay Lethal Became ROH's Most Durable Star.") All I can say to that is, "Watch yourself, Jay!"

THOMAS BOWMAN
Houston, TX



Kevin Owens battled Finn Balor for NXT at Brooklyn's Barclays Center, while nine miles away, his former employer, Ring of Honor, was holding its Field of Honor event at MCU Park.

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TESSA TO A T

Since you guys haven't sold PWI T-shirts for a number of years, can I assume that T-shirt Tessa Blanchard is modeling opposite that table of contents in the February 2016 issue belonged to her dad, Tully?

[Editor's note: We'll let Tessa answer: "It was my dad's!! That's why it is all cut up! It is super, super old."]

BECKY ANDREWS
Charlotte, NC

TWEET NOTHING!

Mark Snyder @snyde043 Dec 14: @AICastlePWI @OfficialPWI I agree that last night's matches felt forced but I think there's still a place for stip matches, MITB is one.

J Hoath @el_hoatho Dec 7: @officialpwi @SashaBanksWWE boss is number 1...others are just fighting for second

Curtis Keibler @CurtisKeibler Nov 29: @BellaTwins got my copy of @OfficialPWI tonight. ...looking great on the cover + great interview! :-)

Gerhard Hiram @gerhard_hiram Nov 15: @OfficialPWI definition of being head above rest class classy dignity honor respect leader a Champion a Legend #nickbockwinkel AWA NWA WWF

william foy @willfo316 Nov 15: Love or hate @JohnCena his record in the @OfficialPWI 500 is incredible since 2004 onwards, 7, 2, 1, 1, 3, 3, 2, 3, 3, 1, 3, 2 #john cena #pwi500 #pwi

Patrick L.C. Meade @PatrickLC-Meade Nov 7: @SashaBanksWWE @itsBayleyWWE Deserve the Match of the Year award @OfficialPWI. Doesn't matter for which one. Trinity Fatu @NaomiWWE Nov 6: "Started from the bottom now we here"...& still working my way up slowly but showly, thank you @OfficialPWI



Sasha Banks proved her superiority to Nikki Bella in the eyes of many and was deserving of Nikki's top position in the "Female 50." Sasha and her fans will have to be content with being voted Woman of the Year.

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Santana Garret @SantanaGarrett_ Nov 5: Beyond grateful and honored to have made #4 in the #PWIFemale50 this year. (It's a pretty big freakin deal!!)

Dana Brooke WWE @DanaBrookeWWE Nov 5: @OfficialPWI thank you so much for the nomination! I swear it's surreal at times 2 think & believe the support I have 4 a passion I #WWE

Uncle Ric Flair @DrunkFlair Nov 5: Damn it people the @OfficialPWI top lists are based on win/loss records and title reigns for the year.

Willie Blanton @Willie_Blanton Nov 4: Willie Blanton Retweeted \$asha Banks You go SASHA! I have to respectfully disagree with @OfficialPWI title or no title @SashaBanksWWE should've been #1 fka travy @fkatravy Nov 4: @

OfficialPWI Congrats to Nikki, so deserved for the amazing year she's had! Everyone needs to chill out. Sasha has many years ahead to win.

Steve @StevieSutter Nov 4: @OfficialPWI @BellaTwins was a Nikki hater, but have really appreciated how much effort and work she has done to become better good choice

Ryan M. C. @RcRyderOrRiot Nov 4: @OfficialPWI Nikki had a tremendous year but Sasha Banks should be number one. Had some of the greatest women's matches in history this year

Nikki & Brie @BellaTwins Nov 4: Thank you @OfficialPWI for naming me #1 I truly feel as if I have won an Olympic gold medal! This achievement has made my past decade beyond

PWI OFFICIAL RATINGS

FOR PERIOD ENDED
JANUARY 1, 2016

TOP 10

- 1 ROMAN REIGNS**
265, Pensacola, FL
(10) **WWE World champion**
- 2 KAZUCHIKA OKADA**
240, Tokyo, Japan
(3) **IWGP heavyweight champion**
- 3 JAY LETHAL**
225, Elizabeth, NJ
(4) **ROH heavyweight champion**
- 4 DEAN AMBROSE**
225, Cincinnati, OH
(7) **WWE Intercontinental champion**
- 5 SHEAMUS**
267, Dublin, Ireland
(9) **No. 1 contender WWE World title**
- 6 ALBERTO DEL RIO**
239, San Luis Potosi, Mex.
(-) **WWE U.S. champion**
- 7 KEVIN OWENS**
266, Marieville, QC
(5) **No. 2 contender WWE World title**
- 8 RODERICK STRONG**
212, New Orleans, LA
(-) **ROH TV champion**
- 9 MICHAEL ELGIN**
265, Toronto, ON
(-) **No. 1 contender ROH heavyweight title**
- 10 FINN BALOR**
190, Bray, Ireland
(-) **NXT heavyweight champion**

PHOTO BY LEE SOUTHRING OF HONOR



JAY LETHAL

TAG TEAMS

- 1 BIG E & KOFI KINGSTON & XAVIER WOODS**
Combined weight: 702 pounds
(3) **WWE World tag team champions**
- 2 NARUKI DOI & YAMATO**
Combined weight: 362 pounds
(-) **GHC Open the Twin Gate champions**
- 3 DAVEY BOY SMITH JR. & LANCE ARCHER**
Combined weight: 520 pounds
(5) **GHC tag team champions**
- 4 KARL ANDERSON & DOC GALLOWS**
Combined weight: 545 pounds
(8) **IWGP tag team champions**
- 5 HANSON & RAYMOND ROWE**
Combined weight: 505 pounds
(-) **Ring of Honor tag team champion**
- 6 DAVEY RICHARDS & EDDIE EDWARDS**
Combined weight: 416 pounds
(5) **TNA tag team champions**
- 7 NICK & MATT JACKSON**
Combined weight: 350 pounds
(7) **PWG tag team champions**
- 8 JIMMY & JEY USO**
Combined weight: 479 pounds
(-) **No. 1 contenders WWE tag team title**
- 9 SIN CARA & KALISTO**
Combined weight: 375 pounds
(-) **No. 2 contenders WWE tag team title**
- 10 BUBBA RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
Combined weight: 549 pounds
(4) **No. 3 contenders WWE tag team title**

WWE

WWE World Heavyweight Champion:

ROMAN REIGNS

(7) 265, Pensacola, FL

- 1—DEAN AMBROSE**
(4) 225, Cincinnati, OH
- 2—SHEAMUS**
(6) 267, Dublin, Ireland
- 3—ALBERTO DEL RIO**
(-) 239, San Luis Potosi, Mex.
- 4—KEVIN OWENS**
(2) 266, Marieville, QC
- 5—RUSEV**
(12) 305, Plovdiv, Bulgaria
- 6—DOLPH ZIGGLER**
(9) 221, Hollywood, CA
- 7—RYBACK**
(8) 291, Las Vegas, NV
- 8—NEVILLE**
(10) 194, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Eng.
- 9—BIG SHOW**
(5) 425, Tampa, FL
- 10—KANE**
(18) 323, Jefferson City, TN

TNA

Champion:

VACANT

- 11—BRAY WYATT**
(13) 285, Brooksville, FL
- 12—R-TRUTH**
(15) 220, Charlotte, NC
- 13—KING BARRETT**
(16) 246, Manchester, England
- 14—STARDUST**
(14) 220, Charlotte, NC
- 15—JACK SWAGGER**
(-) 275, Perry, OK
- 16—TITUS O'NEIL**
(-) 220, Live Oak, FL
- 17—TYLER BREEZE**
(-) 195, Penticton, BC
- 18—GOLDUST**
(-) 260, Hollywood, CA
- 19—MARK HENRY**
(17) 399, Silsbee, TX
- 20—BO DALLAS**
(-) 234, Brooksville, FL
- 1—MATT HARDY**
(1) 235, Cameron, NC
- 2—ETHAN CARTER III**
(2) 225, Cleveland, OH
- 3—LASHLEY**
(6) 273, Denver, CO
- 4—ERIC YOUNG**
(8) 225, Vancouver, BC
- 5—DAVEY RICHARDS**
(-) 202, Othello, WA
- 6—DREW GALLOWAY**
(3) 247, Ayr, Scotland
- 7—BOBBY ROODE**
(4) 225, New York, NY
- 8—MAHABALI SHERA**
(-) 265, Pune, India
- 9—TIGRE UNO**
(9) 148, Tijuana, Mexico
- 10—JESSIE GODDERZ**
(-) 248, Hollywood, CA

ROH

Champion:

JAY LETHAL

(C) 225, Elizabeth, NJ

- 1—RODERICK STRONG**
(5) 212, New Orleans, LA
- 2—MICHAEL ELGIN**
(2) 265, Toronto, ON
- 3—AJ STYLES**
(-) 228, Gainesville, GA
- 4—ADAM COLE**
(1) 205, Panama City, FL
- 5—JAY BRISCOE**
(3) 234, Sandy Fork, DE
- 6—BOBBY FISH**
(6) 200, Albany, NY
- 7—KYLE O'REILLY**
(7) 207, Cape Breton, NS
- 8—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS**
(-) 224, Los Angeles, CA
- 9—ACH**
(4) 190, Austin, TX
- 10—MATT SYDAL**
(8) 165, St. Louis, MO

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or tag team. These ratings are compiled by a committee consisting of Stu Saks, Dan Murphy, Kris Zellner, Louie Dee, Harry Burkett and STRIGGA (cagematch.net, purolove.com). The numbers in parentheses indicate a wrestler's position in that category last issue. Agate-sized ratings are supplied to *PWI* by promoters and can be e-mailed to us at pwireresults@yahoo.com (please put the word "ratings" in the subject line).

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLING FEDERATIONS: CHAMPION—Damien Wayne; **1**—Barreto; **2**—Eric Darkstorm; **3**—Brian Rivers; **4**—Josef Von Schmidt; **5**—Power Lee; **6**—Lance Anoa'i; **7**—Christopher Daniels; **8**—TR Superstar; **9**—Jonny Rose; **10**—Kahagas

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: CHAMPION—Sean Carr; **1**—Bobby Shields; **2**—Breaker Morant; **3**—Azrieal; **4**—Zac Conner; **5**—Chris Wyld; **6**—Cory Kastle; **7**—Ricky Martinez; **8**—Kyle Payne; **9**—Damian Adams; **10**—Chuck Payne

ELITE PRO WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Leslie Leatherman; **1**—Doc Gallows; **2**—Eddie Page; **3**—The Patriot; **4**—Tama Tonga; **5**—Jason Radatz; **6**—Bodie Williams; **7**—Shane Malice; **8**—Chris Cline; **9**—Vince Vega; **10**—Josh McMasters

EVOLVE: CHAMPION—Timothy Thatcher; **1**—Caleb Konley; **2**—Matt Riddle; **3**—Drew Gulak; **4**—Johnny Gargano; **5**—Drew Galloway; **6**—Zack Sabre Jr.; **7**—TJ Perkins; **8**—Tracy Williams; **9**—Anthony Nese; **10**—Davey Richards

I BELIEVE IN WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Rhett Giddins; **1**—Mark Silva; **2**—Lince Dorado; **3**—Teddy Hart; **4**—Tyrannus; **5**—Leo Brien; **6**—Michael Patrick; **7**—Jonny Vandal; **8**—Aaron Epic; **9**—Braydon Knight; **10**—Rex Bacchus

MOUNTAIN STATE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Ken Steel; **1**—Barry Hardy; **2**—Scott Lee; **3**—Thunder Morgan; **4**—Se7en; **5**—The Dark Dragon; **6**—Jimmy Parker; **7**—BoBo Brown; **8**—Damien James; **9**—Mark James; **10**—T.D. Hurt

NATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Jax Dane; **1**—Tim Storm; **2**—Rob Conway; **3**—Hiroshi Tenzan; **4**—Jason Kincaid; **5**—Ricky Ruffin; **6**—Matt Riviera; **7**—Devin Driscoll; **8**—Dru Skillz; **9**—John Saxon; **10**—Satoshi Kojima

NEW KENTUCKY ZONE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Joe Edmonds; **1**—Johnny Bad; **2**—Chief Tomahawk; **3**—Nick Vegas; **4**—Frank the Tank; **5**—The Super Assassin; **6**—Fiji Wildman; **7**—Frank Vanover; **8**—B.W. Anderson; **9**—Kirk Patrick; **10**—Terry Alan

PRO WRESTLING EGO: CHAMPION—The Nightmare; **1**—Xtian Blake; **2**—Chuck McMullen; **3**—Ryan Oshun; **4**—Joe Kane; **5**—Lukas Frost; **6**—Gary Jay; **7**—Monty Warbucks; **8**—Joey Abel; **9**—Barry Wolf; **10**—Mike Carter

RENEGADE WRESTLING ALLIANCE: CHAMPION—Jimmy Cicero; **1**—Nick Estaban Taylor; **2**—Danny Able; **3**—Shane Andrews; **4**—Jason Gory; **5**—Mempho Mofo; **6**—Akuma; **7**—Jun Hado; **8**—Ashton Amherst; **9**—Sonjay Dutt; **10**—Amazing Red

SHINE WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Taylor Made; **1**—Santana Garrett; **2**—Vanessa Kraven; **3**—Ivelisse Velez; **4**—Madison Eagles; **5**—Andrea; **6**—Jessicka Havok; **7**—Allysin Kay; **8**—Su Yung; **9**—Leah Von Dutch; **10**—Amber Gallowes

TENNESSEE KOMBAT WRESTLING: CHAMPION—Bryan Luther; **1**—Marcus Williams; **2**—Rage; **3**—The Super Assassin; **4**—Krutch; **5**—Chris Rose; **6**—Repik; **7**—Johnny Suede; **8**—Frank Vanover; **9**—Sebastian Kage; **10**—Braddock

NXT

Champion:
FINN BALOR

(C) 190, Bray, Ireland

1—SAMOA JOE

(1) 289, American Samoa

2—APOLLO CREWS

(2) 280, Atlanta, GA

3—BARON CORBIN

(3) 275, Lenexa, KS

4—BULL DEMPSEY

(5) 300, Brooklyn, NY

5—LEVIS VALENZUELA JR.

(-) 230, Santo Domingo, Dom. Rep.

6—HUGO KNOX

(-) 247, Chester, UK

7—TYE DILLINGER

(6) 235, Niagara Falls, ON

8—RIDDICK MOSS

(10) 246, Edina, MN

9—RICH SWANN

(-) 165, Baltimore, MD

10—SAMI ZAYN

(-) 205, Montreal, QC

JAPAN

1—KAZUCHIKA OKADA

(1) 240, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—SHINGO TAKAGI

(2) 212, Yamanashi, Japan

3—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI

(-) 200, Konosu, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

4—JUN AKIYAMA

(7) 240, Osaka, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion

5—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA

(5) 230, Kyoto, Japan

6—ISAMI KODAKA

(-) 150, Yokohama, Japan

7—MANABU SOYA

(8) 238, Nagano, Japan

8—YUJI OKABAYASHI

(-) 271, Nankoku, Japan

9—HIDEKI SUZUKI

(-) 242, Hokkaido, Japan

10—TAIJI ISHIMORI

(-) 165, Miyagi, Japan

MEXICO

1—MAXIMO

(1) 203, Mexico City, Mexico
CMLL heavyweight champion

2—PSYCHO CLOWN

(-) 236, Mexico City, Mexico

3—DRAGON LEE II

(-) 165, Jalisco, Mexico

4—ATLANTIS

(4) 181, Guadalajara, Mex.

5—REY BUCANERO

(6) 207, Mexico City, Mexico

6—ANGEL DE ORO

(7) 181, Gomez Palacio, Mex.

7—HIJO DEL FANTASMA

(8) 187, Mexico City, Mexico

8—ULTIMO GUERRERO

(10) 205, Gomez Palacio, Mex.

9—DRAGON ROJO

(-) 187, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

10—VOLADOR JR.

(9) 192, Monclova, Mexico

WOMEN

1—CHARLOTTE

(2) 135, Charlotte, NC
WWE Divas champion

2—PAIGE

(5) 120, Norwich, England

3—BAYLEY

(1) 119, San Jose, CA
NXT Women's champion

4—SASHA BANKS

(4) 114, Boston, MA

5—GAIL KIM

(3) 120, Toronto, ON
TNA Knockouts champion

6—SANTANA GARRETT

(-) 140, Ocala, FL

7—BECKY LYNCH

(8) 135, Dublin, Ireland

8—ASUKA

(-) 137, Osaka, Japan

9—AMBER O'NEAL

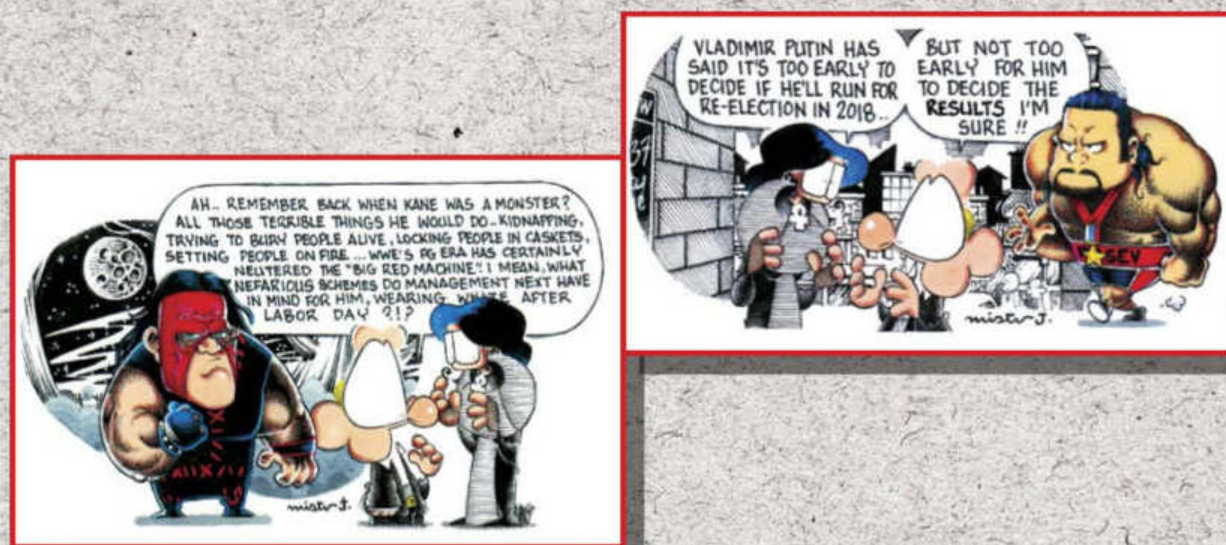
(-) 140, Malibu, VA

10—TAYLOR MADE

(-) 125, Las Vegas, NV

DRAWING BLOOD

BY JASON CONLAN



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